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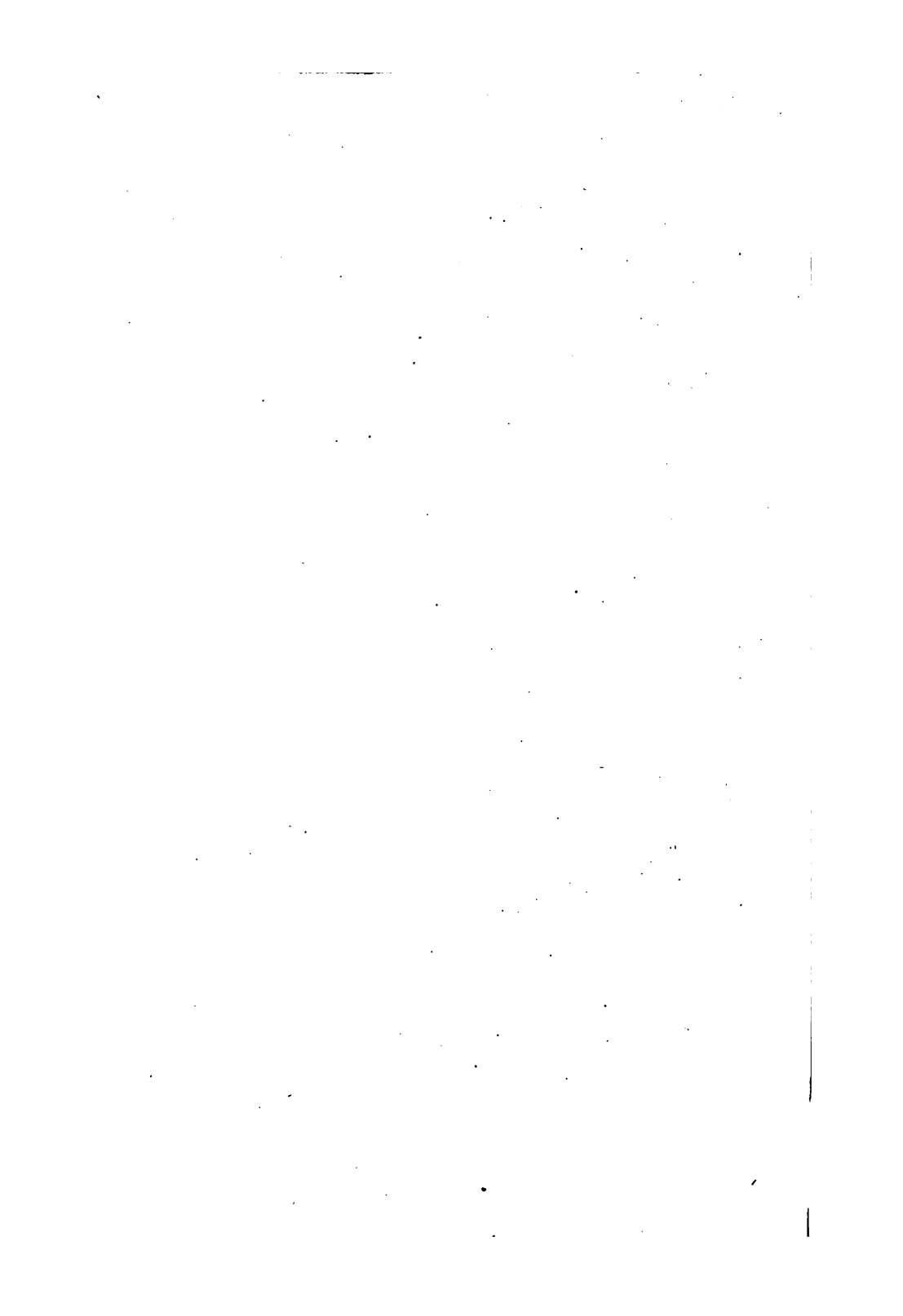
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BY

R. E. FRANCILLON

IN THREE VOLUMES

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BOOK II.

CHAPTER II.

AND so it came about—though my excitement at the time confuses my memory considerably as to the exact details of the ensuing week—that the nature of my career in life became fixed. I was to become a musician, and was to learn my art in Paris. As to pecuniary means, I fear—I very much fear—that Father Laurent, in the course of the conversation which he held with my two new patrons, and of which I did not hear a word, but in the course of which I presume he was persuaded that my departure from my home under their auspices would prove the best thing for me, deceived them very considerably: and that I, ignorantly and unconsciously, robbed him of the greater part of an income from which, one would

have thought, he could spare nothing. Nay, I fear also that I must thereby, to some extent, have robbed his poor.

Among the many faults of my nature of which I am conscious, I do not reckon ingratitude. On the contrary, a kindness even from a friend always weighs me down with a sense of obligation to such an extent that I scarcely like to receive a favour without an immediate prospect of returning it with interest, and fills my heart with an almost dog-like feeling towards him who confers it. And thus I can never recall this period of my life of which I now speak, child as I was, without undergoing a pang of regret, almost of remorse.

I had hitherto lived as my own dog had lived—that is to say, in an atmosphere of kindness, bestowed upon me so freely, so much as a matter of course, that I, consciously at least, appreciated it no more than I consciously appreciated the fresh air of the hills. I could not, of course, have been kept and fed for nothing, and my peasant friends must often have found the times hard enough for themselves without an additional mouth to feed: and now, to crown it all, the Curé was depriving himself of what, judging from the slenderness of his purse, must have been almost necessities of life, in

order to benefit me and give me a chance in the war of the great world. And yet, in spite of all this, and in spite of the affectionate sorrow that filled the whole place for days, and Pré-aux-Fleurs for weeks, before my departure—a sorrow that filled my own eyes with sympathetic tears—I was glad and eager to leave my home. It was a perfectly natural eagerness, no doubt, and I knew no more about the part that money plays in the world than I knew of the world itself: but I cannot, in my soul, excuse myself to myself, however much my unconscious ingratitude sprang from the innocence that belongs to ignorance. Alas! once more I fear that I found it really hard to part from none save Loup: and I was, with all my new artistic ambition, child enough to repent of the career I had chosen, when for the first time I had to go out of doors without him. The appealing look of mute wonder in his eyes when I, for the last time, embraced him and forbade him to follow me, haunted me for long: and all the more as it seemed to contain something of rebuke and of warning. I used to imagine his long and weary waiting for my return, settling down at last into the chronic dulness of a vacant life, such as crushes the nature of dogs even more than that of men: but I did not picture to myself, as I do

now, Aunt Cathon and *Mère* Suzanne with the occupation that formed the one excitement of their hard monotonous peasant life for ever departed from them: Jean-Baptiste, weary of his fiddle, and perhaps consoling himself for the loss of a comrade, for whose sake I can see now that he had long kept himself within bounds, by a return to his wild ways: the Curé, without his pupil, and with his time heavy upon his hands. I am not guilty of vanity when I picture to myself all this. I know now how much love was mine in my old home.

Any one who knows anything of musical history will not need to be reminded that Signor Moretti was the greatest violinist and one of the most eminent composers of his day. Even still, in what I cannot help thinking to be degenerate days, his works contrive to hold their own. But, although I owe it to him that I became a musician, it is not my good fortune to be able to boast myself one of his immediate pupils. His light just shone upon me, and that was all. He lived in Rome: and for hundreds of reasons it was impossible that I could follow him there at once. But in Paris I found myself in good hands. I was the pupil of his pupil, Monsieur Prosper, for whom at first I entertained a shy dislike, owing to his brusque manners, his capricious temper,

and propensity to ridicule : but it was not long before I pierced through the shell, and, according to my nature, came to feel a love that, born of gratitude, ripened into friendship.

Of course it will be understood that I am now beginning to refer to days long subsequent to my bewildering journey to Paris, the events of which are, like those of the days immediately preceding it, far too dream-like to make a detailed narrative of them possible. All I know is that I did arrive somehow, and was soon immersed in hard, dry exercises, that often made me repent, not almost, but altogether, of my ambition, and long for the liberty which I had enjoyed hitherto of making as many imperfect notes, slips in time, and barbarous graces as I pleased. I found very soon that music as an amusement and music as a profession are very different things. Still, however, I worked hard : and if I had not done so willingly, Monsieur Prosper would have made me do so against my will. He was the first person who ever really scolded me, and that is a real and startling experience in the life of a spoiled child.

He was certainly a good teacher, though he had but little enthusiasm even for his art, which he regarded strictly as a profession like any other profession, and as being after all, or rather above all, a means of

making money. He treated it accordingly : and the result was, that while he did not, perhaps, know how to bring out any genius that might be latent in any of his pupils, he did most thoroughly teach all of them how to make the most of themselves in the way that the world admires. He had no crotchets, and scorned all systems that did not bear the seal of success. And yet he himself, with all his common-sense and all his Hebrew blood, was by no means a prosperous man. He was not content with living by his profession—he must needs become rich by it : and so he became, in effect, less an artist than an *impresario* and theatrical speculator. In this capacity he had plenty of knowledge and plenty of boldness : but these good qualities were altogether neutralised by want of tact, want of temper, and want of capital. I am not quite sure that he was not at one time even director, or joint director, or in some way mixed up with the direction of the *Grand Opéra* itself : certainly when I knew him he was always dabbling in a dozen theatrical affairs at once, with the very worst results to his own pocket. Sometimes, even, he was reduced almost to the very last straits : but, like the rest of his race, he was never at his wits' end, never lost confidence in himself, and never relaxed in his energy for a moment even at the

worst of times. He was by no means liked in the profession, but I never heard even his worst enemies throw a shadow of suspicion upon his complete uprightness in all matters of business. If it were the case, as unhappily it is not, that success is always to be gained by working for it and deserving it, he would have died a millionaire.

This would have been a strange person to become my friend, were it not that friendship almost always contains an element of strangeness. I was still a boy: he almost middle-aged. I held transcendental views of life and art: he was an artistic adventurer. I thought only of the soul of music: he of little but its form. I was quiet, romantic, dreamy, and reserved: he, bustling, prosaic, energetic, and self-reliant. For some reasons it was well, for others not so, that I had a friend of this kind. At all events I learned a great deal from him and through him, not only about my profession, but about its professors. Connected as he was with almost all of them, my acquaintance with him laid bare to my unwilling eyes the wretched intrigues, the contemptible jealousies, the atmosphere of sordidness, of stupidity, of charlatanism, and of cant, the conventionalities and all the sickening littlenesses with which the glorious art of music was then and still is so utterly envel-

oped as to be almost suffocated. I learned that if an artist wishes to "succeed," as it is called, he or she must, in order to do so, lay aside all the better part of himself and become, as the Germans say, a rank Philistine. I learned that almost all who style themselves artist are either hucksters or charlatans : that their critics are for the most part much the same, only with a stronger dash of dishonesty : and that audiences consist almost entirely of flocks of silly sheep, whom *clagues* and critics lead by the nose. If I seem to speak strongly upon this matter, I am glad of it. I would speak more strongly if I could : and I could do so without suspicion, inasmuch as I do not pretend that I personally should have succeeded any better than I have done even in a better state of things. Now this early insight into the nature of the world in which I was henceforth to move, while it proved far from useless to me, was the cause of my losing a considerable amount of enthusiasm : and loss of enthusiasm for his art is the worst misfortune that can befall one who aspires to be an artist in any form. It was impossible for me not to lose a great deal of mine when I knew, for example, that some great *prima donna*, whose whole genius, or rather whose whole stock-in-trade, consisted of a tolerably good voice, neither worse nor better than

that of nine women out of ten, had gained her public position by the path of private protection: that the enthusiastic crowd which took her horses from her carriage and drew her home in triumph consisted of supernumeraries of the theatre: that the applause that filled the house was originated and regulated by hands hired for the purpose: that the shower of bouquets thrown upon the stage were the lady's own property hours before they lay at her feet: that the critics who described it all in such glowing terms knew all this as well as, perhaps better than, I knew it, were even more ignorant of music than the audience, and wrote from no higher motive than love of their friends and hatred of their own and of their friends' foes. I fear it is only too true that they not seldom wrote from very much lower motives. I remember, to cite one instance of what I mean, a certain leader of criticism in my own time, by whose power scores of reputations were made and marred, who, whenever a singer was about to make a first appearance, would call and say, "Signor," or "Madame," or "Mademoiselle, I have already prepared three notices of your performance of to-morrow evening. The first, as you see here, is sufficiently favourable, and will insure you a *succès d'estime*: it is yours for so many francs. The second, which I also show you, clearly

proves you to be the greatest singer of the past, of the present, and of the future ; it is yours for so many francs more. The third, which it is unnecessary for you to see now, you may have *gratis* : but, if it appears, I do not think that you will care to sing in Paris again." I do not, of course, mean to say that in all countries musical criticism has attained to such a pitch of sublimity as this, or that in any country critical dishonesty is always of a gross and conscious kind. But I certainly do say that it needs every note that has ever been produced by true genius to prevent me from hating my art as much as I despise my profession. "It is an ill bird that fouls its own nest," they say : but in this case I am not ashamed to be called an ill bird.

But I am in effect anticipating : for my blindness was of course not removed immediately. I knew far too little of things or of people to lose the enthusiasm of my nature immediately ; and for long I worked on in the belief, not only that my own merit was great, but that in art-matters merit must necessarily achieve success. Now, indeed, I should be very much tempted to say to any singer, composer, or other musician who asked me for the secret of success, "It is simple, and it is this : do *not* deserve it. For no man can serve two masters, and the

kingdom of Art is not of this world." Whether the same advice would be equally applicable to poets and painters, I know not : but I am sure, from long experience, that it applies to musicians. But I daresay that it does apply to all equally—that, in order to succeed,

"Musician, or Painter, or Poet,
We must speak as the world may choose,
And for truest worship—show it
In silence to the Muse;"—

and that what the Muse chooses and what the world chooses are two very different things indeed. Of course I do not mean to say that good men never do succeed : on the contrary. But then it is by having other qualities besides merit.

I need not say that in those days I was poor enough, and that, as I grew in years and stature, I developed into a Bohemian of that famous tribe whose capital settlement used to be the Latin quarter. But of this part of my life I will say little, for Bohemia is Bohemia all the world over, and it would be unnecessary to describe it to those who have sojourned in it, and impossible to those who have not. I will only say that in those days the Latin country was in its glory, for they were the

birthdays of the great romantic *renaissance*, or rather revolution, in Art and literature. Of course I was romanticist, heart and soul, and the word "classical" stank in my nostrils. In this respect I should very much like to chronicle some of my recollections, for the period is still replete with interest and importance. It was, of course, not the fortune of an obscure musical student like myself to see much of the heroes of that time, but still I could not help coming to know a great deal about them at second-hand. But I will refrain, for it is of myself that I am speaking now. With regard to myself, then, I added to my musical practice the scribbling of much highly unclassical verse, the growth of long hair, and, in general, as Byronic a style and demeanour as I could manage within my limited scope. I also, in a small way, liked to be considered rather a dangerous person, and longed to experience a *grande passion*. What was practically more important, I obtained through Monsieur Prosper a small theatrical engagement and a pupil or two of my own, and I have every reason to believe that my master was satisfied with my progress. Before very long I found myself justified in thinking that I might be able to carry out my childish impulse of visiting Signor Moretti

at Rome, which had, ever since I had formed it, been the height of my ambition.

Everybody can point back to some particular period of his life as being distinctly the happiest: and the period of which I am now speaking was mine. I worked hard, I really loved my art, I was full of hope and confidence, my personal wants were few and easily satisfied, I had many acquaintances, some friends, and much pleasure. If my purse was light, my heart was lighter still.

But one morning—how well I remember it!—when I was attending a musical rehearsal at the theatre, Monsieur Prosper came up to me and said,—

“I am getting to have too many irons in the fire, I am afraid. I have not time to attend properly to half of them, what with one thing and another. I must send off a few of my pupils, unless you will help me. I can turn over some of them to you very easily. For instance, there is the *pensionnat* of Madame Mercier. You don't profess the piano, of course: but you'll do very well for a week or two. I ought to go there to-morrow: but, as you know, my mornings are all otherwise engaged for a fortnight at least, so it is impossible. Will you take

them off my hands just for the present? It will be worth your while."

Of course I consented willingly; nor do I remember that I experienced the shadow of a presentiment of what was to come of my consenting to render Monsieur Prosper so apparently slight a service.

CHAPTER III.

ON arriving punctually next morning at Madame Mercier's, I found that I had to give three lessons. My first pupil proved to be wholly uninteresting in every respect: indeed I can scarcely recall her to mind. The second was a young English lady, whom I remember well for many reasons, although but little for her own sake.

The hour which I had to devote to the latter had nearly expired when the door opened, and another young girl entered quietly and sat down in a retired part of the room, as though to wait until I should be disengaged. I just looked round for a moment, and saw that she started a little—I suppose that she had expected to see Monsieur Prosper. More than that, however, I did not see just then, for she to whom my immediate attention was due was in the midst of a difficult passage, and making a mess of it. But when the lesson was over, I certainly did see

something more. I do not know to what extent my face betrayed my admiration : to some extent, however, it must have done so, for she blushed a little as she curtsied to me, and then without a word walked straight to the piano. I did not hear her voice until she began to sing.

Neither was the voice in itself, nor was the use that she made of it, very wonderful : nor was it even of a kind that I in general used to find sympathetic. Usually I care nothing for a voice, however beautiful it may be in other respects, that has not depth and shadow : and hers, although musical, was wholly without either. And yet somehow—how shall I possibly make myself intelligible?—it seemed to be sympathetic to a side of my nature that had never hitherto revealed itself to me save by dim and momentary flashes. Like certain other sounds, like certain colours, like certain odours, it seemed to speak of a life other than that which I always remembered to have lived since I was born : to be associated with one of which I was mysteriously conscious, but did not consciously remember. It carried my heart backward beyond the reach of memory altogether, and threw me into that state in which one is forced to believe in the doctrine that the soul lives, and enjoys, and suffers before it is born.

It was this, I think, even more than her great beauty, that made this third hour to rush by so rapidly, and myself to be filled with such a glow of strange happiness at its close. Of this my first interview with her I have of course nothing to say that can be expressed in definite words. Outwardly, it was nothing more than a mere ordinary music-lesson. But, in reality, it seemed to me to be nothing short of a revelation, though of a vague, unintelligible kind: nor did I care to make it clearer to myself, or to understand it better. I only felt that I had found my ideal, even though, as is always the case, it had proved to be altogether different from the ideal of my imagination.

I do not know whether my experience is singular or not. Judging from what men say, the special kind of sympathy which we call love is for the most part born unconsciously, and apart from any effort of the will. But I did not "fall in love." I sought it, and threw myself into it consciously and intentionally. As I have already said, I was in search of a *grande passion*—of a heroine for all my dreams of romance: and if I had not found this particular heroine, I should inevitably have found another. But my temporary pupil had the advantage of fulfilling my whole idea to perfection: and I think

that she would have rendered me faithless to any heroine whom I might have fancied that I had found before seeing her. If I had had a Rosaline, as I had not, she would have proved my Juliet. She was beautiful beyond all question: she was herself romantic: she was a lady: she was herself to be an artist: and—not the least of her merits in the eyes of one of my character—she was poor and dependent: so that she was at one and the same time both my superior and my equal. Hitherto my acquaintance with women had been confined to our good comrades the *grisettes*, who had none of these advantages, excepting that of poverty: but now——

Well, as I have said, I chose her for my heroine deliberately and almost in cold blood: really, I believe, at first because I thought it the right thing to do. But, alas! "*On ne badine pas avec l'Amour.*" The more I came to see of her, the more my feeling towards her became less and less a matter of vanity or even of mere admiration. Before long I forgot myself in her altogether. This is not a mere phrase: I mean literally what I say, let the reader shrug his shoulders as much as he pleases at the notion of carrying sentiment that is not born of passion to so extreme a length. I know that in this frigidly

philosophical age no one ever suffers himself to feel an emotion that is inconsistent with prudence and comfort: I know that the extreme of sentiment shares a well-known quality of the sublime, and that the flights of it in which the poets of another age used to indulge, have come to be regarded as mere ornaments of a sort that has gone out of fashion, and that never at any time represented anything true or genuine. In so far as men now consider the desire of possession to be, after all, the ultimate cause of what is called love, I agree with them: but, at the same time, I know from my own experience, that in my own case love for a woman may be born in mere sentiment, and that mere sentiment may so continue to give it power and life, that passion may play a part that is so slight as to be indeed imperceptible. I certainly first of all loved, because I wished to love: and I continued to do so, because she whom I loved filled all my thoughts and all my fancies in a way with which mere passion could have had nothing to do. This kind of love I hold to be the most overwhelming of all. Passion may be directed, if not conquered: but he is lost who becomes the slave of a dream.

After all, though, I daresay that almost every man, if the truth were known, has a romance of the same

nature hidden away somewhere in the unconscious memory of his heart—

“Some forgotten rose
Changed to an amaranth ere yet 'twas blown—
Some bud embalmed within an Alp of stone”—

even though in other respects his life is written in the plainest and stoniest of prose. On this assumption I will cease to defend myself and my theories about this matter farther. In any case, I think I have said enough to show what I mean: and the subject is far too vague and complex to tempt me to go into it more deeply.

At any rate, without thinking of consequences, without even putting my hopes and wishes into shape, I indulged this new feeling of mine to the very utmost. I continued to encourage it, even when it was full grown; and deliberately, something in the spirit of the Knight of La Mancha, sought to come up to the ideal of the lover of romance. And it was not long before I could not help seeing that the love which I had not as yet dared to declare, but yet had been unable to conceal, was far from being scorned.

How long in reality this state of things continued I am wholly unable to say. It must have lasted more than a moment and less than a century: but

even so much certainty as that I do not derive from memory. But at last—again just after a rehearsal, and while I was putting my violin into its case—Monsieur Prosper, who was also present in some capacity or other, or, more likely, in several capacities at once, came up to me again. I had not seen much of him of late—indeed for that matter I had not seen much of any of my old friends for some little time past.

“Well,” he said, in his usual abrupt manner, “and how did you find things going on up there? Are they in want of a *primo tenore*? Because, if so, I think we have just been listening to one that is quite out of his place among us poor mortals.”

This was one of his ways of making enemies. He had a special knack of delivering his sarcasms just when they must necessarily be overheard by those at whose expense they were made.

“What is that you say, Monsieur Prosper?” asked our own *primo tenore*, who had just finished a grand *aria*, and was now passing us on his way out.

“Ah, pardon. I did not see you. I was only remarking to Monsieur Félix here how splendidly you brought out that *Ut de poitrine*—it was superb. It is really a shame that every violin in the place happened to be sharp at that exact moment. How

was it, Félix? But you have not answered my question. Is it true that they believe in Rossini up there? Or have the mad doctors belied him?" Rossini, by the way, in his character of innovator, was, as a matter of course, a special aversion of Monsieur Prosper in those days before Paris had accepted him.

"Up where?"

"In the moon, of course. You have been there so long that I thought you were going to stay there for good. My dear fellow, where in the world have you been all these weeks, that nobody has seen you?"

"My friends must have been very blind, then. I have been at the theatre every night."

"Ah, that is good! I have certainly seen some one not unlike you sitting in the orchestra—but yourself, no. And if I were you, and wanted a double to receive my salary for me while I was visiting the planets, I would at all events get one that would do me credit—who would neither cut my friends nor play out of time. Ah, it must be a big orchestra for me not to tell which instrument it is that is doing the mischief."

I generally took his scolding in as good part as it was meant. But this time I sympathised with the *primo tenore*. I was about to reply a little sharply,

when a grave and strangely kind look came into his eyes, which made me silent at once.

His words, however, were less kind than the look which accompanied them. I do not think that he had the power of speaking quite seriously, even when he wished to do so.

"My dear Félix," he said, "whether you have been to the skies or not, I cannot help thinking—do you not feel it yourself?—that there are symptoms about you of the *Ange—sans G.*"

I guessed what he meant immediately, and have no doubt that my face showed that I guessed it. I coloured with the shame that every one feels when he finds that the romance of his life is read by worldly and unsympathetic eyes.

"I daresay there are," I said, as lightly as I could. "There are about most people, in one way or another."

"Yes — because they're born so: and I should never dream of quarrelling with them for it. On the contrary, I approve of the arrangement. But your ears are not long by nature, my dear boy—at least not so very long, that is to say."

"Thanks for the compliment."

"Look here. You mean to be an artist, don't you?"

"Of course I do."

"Well, then, I've known a great many artists in my time—a great many. And I've also known a great many men who had the stuff in them, and might have been artists, only——"

"Well?"

"Only some took to drink, and some took to—you know what I mean."

"Indeed I do not."

"Yes, you do. Flirt as much as you like: women are charming creatures, especially *coquettes*: and it's a useful excitement. I do it myself whenever I get the chance—and I do get the chance sometimes, though I'm not exactly *beau garçon*. Have as many *liaisons* as you please: it's the best way of getting to learn the world and how to keep straight and safe in it, if you can spare the time, which I confess I can't. But, in the name of thunder, keep clear of a grand passion! I know something of such things: and I know a great deal about you. And I tell you, I, Louis Prosper, that no real artist ever cared for a woman above his art—that is, above himself, which is the same thing: and that is what you seem to be in a fair way of doing. You are quite capable of it. And I won't have my best pupil spoiled before my eyes by the best she of them all if I can help it."

This was certainly a little too much for me to stand. "And what——" I was beginning, when he interrupted me by laying his arm upon my shoulders while he shrugged his own.

"Ah, you think me a stupid old fellow," he said: "but you are wrong. It is you who are the stupid young one. This wonderful she is to be your lode-star, and all that sort of thing, is she not? I know. But what would you? Perhaps you have not thought? *Eh bien!* I have thought, though."

"I do not see what business it is of any one but myself."

"Perhaps you don't. But it is. Do you think I say all this for the sake of your own *beaux yeux*? Bah! not Louis Prosper! Perhaps you will think next that he has not been teaching you for his own sake? A likely thing, indeed! *Corpo d'un cane!* I thought better things of you, my dear Félix, than that you should risk your career for a fancy—as you are, I can very well see. I know you. You will end either in the Morgue or in marriage: and either way there will be an artist spoiled. Come—think of me: think of Moretti. Do you think he made his *concerto* in A sharp minor by falling in love? Not he—it was by keeping his brain clear and his heart whole: and yet he was a man *aux bonnes fortunes*. But then a *bonne*

fortune is not a grand passion, you understand? Do you think that I made my—— Be a man. Take some little Pauline or Adèle from the *corps de ballet* to make you comfortable till you can afford to look higher. There are plenty who would jump at you in this very house, not to speak of elsewhere, and who would not expect champagne *every* day. Stick to your fiddle, crop your ears, send love to his father, who is the devil, and come and dine with me. *Sole Normande*—cutlet *financière*—a salad—a glass of Yquem? Will that suit you? And, by the way, I shall be able to go myself to Madame Mercier's again now. Never mind, though, you shall have another pupil to make up. *Au revoir, mesdemoiselles*. Come, Félix, I have forgotten my breakfast long ago."

But I was by no means grateful for his intended kindness.

"Thanks, Monsieur Prosper," I said, as coldly and stiffly as I could, "I have an engagement:" and walked away in a rage.

He shrugged his shoulders once more. "I must dine alone, then," I heard him say to himself. "Poor fellow! It's always the way. Yes, it's quite true—women *are* the devil: there's no doubt about it."

Monsieur Prosper was certainly not a man of tact. His advice had been altogether well meant, but it had, as may well be supposed, jarred upon me altogether. It was not that I objected to it in the least from a moral point of view, although, no doubt, I ought to have done so: for the atmosphere that I breathed since leaving my old home was certainly not less free than that of the latter, and infinitely less pure. My childhood was not strict, to say the least of it. But this rigmarole, as it seemed to me, of flirtations, *bonnes fortunes*, marriage, the Morgue, Moretti, the *corps de ballet*, and *sole Normande*, was wholly out of harmony with the key in which my life seemed now to be set unchangeably. If he had actually mentioned her name in the same breath with all these things, I do not think I could have borne it. As it was, I almost think that though Monsieur Prosper was my friend, and I knew it, I for some minutes knew what is meant by the word hate. Had some evil genius just then transported us both to some quiet spot in the Bois, and changed our bows into swords, I think I should, at all events, have gone so far as to cry out "*En garde!*"

As I am speaking of what I felt at this moment, I may as well finish. It almost invariably happens, that when one feels most strongly, one is then most

liable to be impressed by any grotesque image that may chance to present itself. The intense absurdity of the idea of Monsieur Prosper being made to flourish a small sword almost made me laugh aloud as I walked along, and certainly made me repent of the manner in which I had parted from him. But, at the same time, though I did him justice in this respect, I was unconsciously harbouring a feeling which lasted more or less strongly for days, and which was far less excusable than my anger. I felt a positive disgust for music—not as a profession, but as an art and as itself—for my friends, for every person, and for everything, in short, that had happened since I had left my true home. And why? Because, forsooth, I was the Marquis de Créville, and Monsieur Prosper was only a Jew fiddler! The blood which I had derived from ancestors, not so far back as the common ancestor of us all, but from knights and barons of the Crusades, from *Murcéaux de France*, and from fine gentlemen and finer ladies of more recent times—each and all of whom would have treated him as a creature that might be useful and amusing enough in his proper place, but, to gentlemen and good Christians, otherwise unclean—seemed all of a sudden to rebuke me for having not only made this man my friend, but for having made

him my friend to such an extent as to have given him a right to find fault with me, and for having allowed him to degrade me to a position which they would have regarded as being no higher or better than that of a mountebank. And what was this thing called Art, after all, if it could only be served by a man's throwing himself under its chariot-wheels, and sacrificing to it all the best part of human nature? What but a Moloch, worse than the Baal of the world? Prosper's whole doctrine had disgusted as much as his manner of stating it had offended me: and as I could argue neither against the truth of what he had said nor against the merit of his intentions towards myself, I had to throw myself back upon my fictitious superiority of rank and race, and to soothe myself with the absurd consciousness that I, as a gentleman born, must needs have finer feelings and truer instincts than he. And so, perhaps, I had: but assuredly not because I had a claim to call myself Marquis, while he was an artist and nothing more. Certainly pride, or, as I should prefer to call it, vanity of birth, must be a very ineradicable thing if I, who have, as a good child of the Republic, believed in equality and fraternity from my cradle, was guilty of so gross a lapse into it as this: and if it often takes such a form as it

did with me then, it must be as contemptible as it is ineradicable.

Before evening came, my heroine had heard from me the whole story of my love. The next morning, in all the intoxication of triumph, I told Monsieur Prosper what I had done. But he only shrugged his shoulders once more, and said nothing.

And now followed a season, not of happiness, but of glorious fever. I loved and was loved: and, as if that were not sufficient, mine was a love of which the course must needs be anything but smooth. It also had—though I scarcely know how or why—an element of mystery about it that made it more exciting still. I think that we both preferred that this should be so: she certainly did. So my whole time became taken up with contriving meetings, in looking forward to them till they came, and in thinking about them when they were over. Most people, I doubt not, would have called me dissipated while I was a sufficiently good fellow among my comrades, and would have considered that a serious passion had steadied me: for the free life of my friends was mine no more. What they thought of me I do not know, for I never cared to know. It was now that I was really dissipated, both morally and intellectually. I still studied a little, but no longer

in the spirit of a student: for my heart was no longer in anything that had not reference to her. I have heard of such a passion producing an opposite effect—of its acting as a healthy tonic, and not as a poisonous stimulant: of its leading men to do great things and to make the best of themselves. But I did not find it so: and so far, at least, Monsieur Prosper had not proved to be wrong in his estimate of my character. Indeed I am, on the whole, inclined to agree with him in holding that the less a would-be artist has to do with really serious passion, the better for him as an artist. By serious love I do not, of course, mean the passion that endures for a season only, however strong it may be while it lasts: I mean that which colours a man's life and changes his character: I mean that which by its very nature can never bear good fruit. After all, the cultivation of art depends, more than any other human pursuit, upon the even and harmonious working to one and the same single end of the brain, of the senses, and of the soul. The greatest artists of modern times have been just those whose natures have been the least disturbed by external influence: some, by reason of a strength that has enabled them to throw off emotion at will, others, by reason of an incapacity of receiving any

emotion not in harmony with their true selves. And so it will be found that the cardinal doctrine of the gospel of Art, as of the gospel of Christianity, is the subjugation of external nature: and that before a man can rightly express human emotion and its results, he must not only cease to be a slave to it, but become its master. Very few are born masters: not many are born freemen. And so let not the artist love too well: let him beware of going beyond mere passion, which passes, and friendship, which strengthens and does not disturb. I own that this is a cold, a disagreeable, and an unpopular creed: but then truth is apt to be cold, disagreeable, and unpopular. He who would be a priest of the temple must submit to lead a life apart from other men. It may be that he can best express emotion who can feel it most: but then he must use his power of feeling as a slave—not obey it as a tyrant.

But since in my case these considerations come too late, and love had proved himself conqueror, why, it might be asked, did not these two, if they were really in love, do as hundreds of others have done in their place—Why did they not honestly make up their minds, poor as they were, to fight the battle of life bravely side by side, and to bear

all things for each other's sake until, for each other's sake, they had gained what the world calls victory?

Yes, but I was living in a dream. I never thought of, or realised, anything except that I loved and was loved. She had no friends to compel me to think of what was right or wrong, wise or foolish. There was no one to bring me to a pause with a sudden demand to know what were my "intentions"—that is the right form, I believe—and a man who is blindly in love is not very likely to ask himself his own. Who, indeed, shall give reasons for what he does or does not do in a dream? And what man who really loves ever has "intentions"?

One wet and miserable morning—do I not remember it well?—we had met in the gardens of the Tuileries, which was an occasional place of *rendez-vous* for us as for many another pair of lovers. She was looking marvellously beautiful even for her: indeed it is as I saw her then that I like best to think of her, and none the less that her beauty was increased by a slight shadow of sadness—in spite of which she made full amends for the absence of the sun.

Of course I told her so, but did not call a smile to her face. On the contrary, she, instead of heed-

ing my words, gave me her hand to hold and began herself to speak.

"Oh, how shall I tell you what has happened?"

Her tone was more than enough to alarm me too much to allow of my doing more than question her silently.

"Miss Raymond has just told me that she leaves Paris. What is to be done?"

"That she leaves Paris!" I could only say, with a sinking heart; for I somehow felt a presentiment that this meant the end of my dream—that I must answer her question about what must be done.

"It is only too true. She is going back to England."

Now if I had been capable of looking forward at all, I should have known that this must have happened sooner or later. But then I had not been capable of looking forward. In my heart I had been fancying that the present was to last for ever: and so the news came upon me like a blow that made my heart stand still. That I must actually have turned pale and faint I could read in the sudden look of anxiety that filled her eyes.

"When did you hear this?" was all I could manage to say.

"This morning."

"And that you go with her? Surely you cannot mean that?"

"I must, dearest Félix."

We were silent for a full minute. Then I said,—

"Do not go—remain here—be my wife."

I daresay that I spoke coldly and quietly: for words are always cold and tame when the heart is full. The tongue has a pride of its own: and when it cannot express all, it prefers to express nothing. But then, when the heart is full to overflowing, there is no need of words. Doubtless my eyes spoke for me—at all events I looked with so much eagerness of anxiety as to see the "yes" for which my soul longed hanging upon her lips. But it did not reach my ears.

"Why do you wait to answer?" I went on, suddenly and quickly; "are we not one already, in everything but in name? Surely Miss Raymond has no claim upon you now, when we belong to each other. Tell her, then, that you cannot go with her to England: that you cannot live in one land while your heart is in another. Have you not said so to me many times? As for a year or two of poverty, that shall be our pride! We

will conquer the world together, which will conquer us if we part: and to part even for a time, without seeing an end to our parting, is to risk everything without need. We two, who live outside the world and scorn it, must not make marriage and love a question of so many francs. Do you give me the present, Angélique, and I will answer for your future! and I will find strength and courage for both. It is for your sake I ask you: if you wish me to be worthy of you, if you ever wish to be proud of me, you must give me the power, and you must give it now. Did I not tell you that you were my sun? and would you suddenly plunge me into darkness, when you might, with a word, make me all, I swear to you, that even you could wish me to be?"

"And you are not strong enough to wait—to trust me?"

"To trust you?—for ever! But to wait? No—when there is no need—when you can come to me now. Is it you that are not strong enough to trust me? Do you not believe that with you I can do all things—without you, nothing? Angélique, I will not lose you, if I can help it, even for a day: for without you, a day would seem

eternal. I have asked you for your own sake—I now ask you for mine. Stay with me—do not let us risk the good part of our lives lightly: nothing calls you away. Oh, Angélique, what can I say more than that I will live for you for ever—that you *shall* be proud of me, and that my life is in your hands?”

She had started when I first asked her to remain with me; and during the rest of my appeal she had never raised her eyes. Now she gave a deep sigh, and I felt the hand, which I still held closely, tremble; but instead of saying “yes,” she only answered,—

“But I *must* go now.”

And nothing more than this, in spite of all that I could say, could I obtain from her. Indeed I must confess that my own arguments were bad enough, in all conscience. I could only promise her a life of poverty, to say the least of it. I could only endow her with the wealth of a future that had as yet given no tangible sign: and I could not justifiably—as any sensible person would hold—ask her to give up her life of comfort and luxury in order to live in some poor garret in the midst of my not very reputable theatrical surroundings, from which it must

needs be not a few but a great many years before I could even hope to emerge. I fear that the impulses of love are often terribly selfish, even when they are the purest and the most sincere. She said nothing about this, of course. I, consciously at least, did not think it: but I must have known in my soul that I was doing wrong. But still, right or wrong, for her to leave me and go to a land of which I knew nothing, where anything, for what I knew, might happen—where she might die, where she might forget me, where she would at least be surrounded by a new atmosphere, by new scenes, by new faces, and worst of all, by new admiration—the thought was simply unbearable. He who loves as I loved, must, it seems, be jealous of something: and I was now jealous of England—of the whole world. And so I continued to urge her, though against all right and reason. But it was in vain.

Nevertheless we did not part so. It was to be our last meeting: for although Miss Raymond was not to set out for England immediately, she was to leave Paris at once. And though my mistress would not grant my desire for an immediate marriage, I had no reason otherwise to complain. She convinced me that it was from no want of affection that she

withheld her consent: and our last words were vows of eternal faith and constancy, whatever might happen.

And so the first part of my dream came to an end. I saw her again, indeed, several times before she left the French shore, but only from a distance. But very soon I lost even this poor consolation, and then Paris became a desert to me indeed.

CHAPTER IV.

THERE was once upon a time a certain philosopher who, by the mere exercise of his will, could die whenever he pleased : could put himself into a state of trance, during which his soul, like all living souls, retained its own individuality, but wandered at large into infinite space and infinite time, where there are no special conditions of life and energy, where there are no parts or atoms, but all things are merged in one vast whole. We realise much the same kind of sensation whenever we enter the great city of all great cities.

In every other place we live. Every other spot of earth has an individuality of its own : and when we are in any other spot than this, we also have ours, consciously felt by ourselves and recognised by those about us. Every other place is a place of traffic, of pleasure, of history, of study, of torpor, or of some one of a hundred other things, as the case may be :

and every inhabitant of it is more or less in keeping with its characteristic quality in an understood and appreciated degree—in a word, can feel himself, and feel and be felt by others, so as to have a separate existence from the mass. But London has, of all places in the world, the power of absorbing existences, and of merging them in its own. It is more a city of pleasure even than Paris : more of traffic than New York : more of history than Rome : more of study than Oxford : more of torpor than Denethorp. And it is all this, and the opposite to all this, and a great deal else besides, at one and the same time. No one can possibly feel his own individual existence. On entering the universal city he is lost in the whole, like a rain-drop in the sea—like the soul of Hermotimus in the soul of the universe itself.

Doubtless it is a glorious sensation, even though it may considerably diminish our self-conceit, to quit the small for the great : to exchange our own narrow bodies for the vast body of humanity itself. But it is not quite so glorious a sensation when this vast body, as multiform in its aspects as Proteus himself, chooses to assume to us its most evil guise : when it wears the aspect of infinite hunger and of infinite cold. Then a man would fain still farther imitate the philosopher in question by recovering once more

his separate, his individual life, however narrow and confined it might be, and however miserable : for it is better to feel, if starve one must, that one at least starves as a man, and not as a mere atom of a vast starving machine. It need scarcely be said that Félix was not among those to whom a return to his old life was possible. He had chosen to follow his fate to London : and now he must drain whatever cup he might find there, whether of gold or of gall, and whether he chose or no.

Certainly luck had so far been against him : for his present position could not be called altogether the result of imprudence. Had the theatre not been burned, he with his few wants and solitary manner of existence could have lived on as well, in a pecuniary sense, as he had lived in Paris, and have dreamed of future fame and thought of Angélique as well here as there. As time went on, too, his position would doubtless have improved, for he was really a skilful and promising musician : and if merit seldom "succeeds" by its own force, it seldom altogether fails. But now he was, by the destruction of the house at which he was engaged, entirely thrown out of work : for engagements are by no means so plentiful as those who require them—at least they were not so in those days, whatever the case may be now.

Besides, he had of course long since spent the small sum of money that he had brought with him from Paris. He had saved nothing, he had lost his violin, and he had made no friends who could be of any assistance to him.

Of course there were many others worse off than he. He was not burdened with a wife and a dozen children : he was not in feeble health : he was not seventy years old. Surely, he thought to himself that night, as hundreds and thousands of young, healthy, and unburdened men have thought before him, there must be some way of getting a living, even if in order to do so he should have to desert his profession for a while : and before he fell asleep, as he did, and soundly, he had come to grieve for his violin, not as for a good instrument, but as for a dear friend : for its own sake, that is, far more than for the daily bread which it represented. None but the artist can tell how dear to the heart that mysterious thing called a musical instrument may be which use and association have endowed with what seems like sympathetic life—with a soul made up of all the fancies, and all the passions, and all the thoughts with which its strings have trembled since it first was made to speak. But there is consolation in thinking that a not inglorious death has saved what

we love from danger of desecration : that whatever might prove to be the fate of the master, the soul which his hands had made is safe among the stars. And, now that he was put to it, and with this thought for a consolation, after all, he came to think also, there are many worse hindrances in the way of winning the world's battle than that of having nothing to lose. Must not the man inevitably conquer who has to choose between victory and death? With Angélique true to him, what would he not do? Love and the instinct of self-preservation—the poetry and the prose of life—came to his aid, and filled him with the full courage which is the last thing that a man should lose. Nor did the morning bring about a reaction.

But, alas! courage, youth, health, and independence are not talismans. Even they, united, cannot without external aid obtain employment at a day's notice : nor, very often, for a great many days. And then Félix had disadvantages. He could scarcely speak English, and he had lost the only instrument that he knew how to handle. And so, after three or four days of ineffectual search and exertion, he began to feel his courage ooze away with his physical strength. Love and fame, indeed! he was fast reaching a condition in which he would forfeit the

highest throne in the palace of art, and Angélique to boot, for bread, and yet be neither the worse artist nor the worse lover. "*Omnia vincit amor*," say the poets; but they are wrong, as those who have known what the word hunger really means know well. *Omnia vincit fames*, they should say; only it would not be pretty—and, besides, it would not scan.

After all, to say this is not to prove so guilty of treason to romance as might at first be thought. In these days Love has ceased to hold a monopoly of romantic material. Poverty competes with it on terms which, to say the least of it, are fully equal: even as the story which the winter forest has to tell, which brings no tears indeed, but fills the heart with barren desolation, is to the full as effective as the song of a spring flower. Hunger, as the handmaid of poverty, has a romance of its own—and a terrible one too.

There is a well-known natural impulse that leads men to the scenes of their great disasters as well as to those of their great crimes. Thus it happened that, after having spent the greater part of the next day in aimlessly wandering about the streets, Félix, towards evening, found himself once more in front of the *débris* of the theatre. Nor did he find himself

there alone: for the impulse that had brought him thither had brought many of his companions in misfortune to the same spot. He conversed with several of them, and more than once had occasion to regret on their account—though not, as yet, for a moment on his own—that he had refused the charity that had been offered to him last night. The very few shillings that he had still about him were very soon his own no more; and he began to long for the purse that he had scorned. While talking with one of the most unfortunate of the victims of the fire, and thinking this very thought, he felt a slap upon his shoulder, and on looking round suddenly and rather angrily, saw the easily-remembered form of Barton himself, as fresh from his hearth-rug as a child from its cradle.

“Why, man alive!” said the latter, “do you mean to say you’ve been standing on this very spot ever since yesterday?”

Félix, wholly unversed in English types, and remembering the incident of the purse, not unnaturally took Barton for some eccentric millionaire. It is true that the man was shabby in appearance: but then there is nothing incompatible in general seediness with millionairism—rather the other way. If a man is particularly well dressed, it is far more likely

that he carries his capital upon his back than when, by carelessness about dress, he implies that he has no need to cultivate personal appearance. So he made him a polite answer, and, in the course of a conversation that followed, took occasion to explain to him the case of his companion. In a trice Barton's hand was in his pocket, which, it will be remembered, contained just ten guineas besides the contents of Mark Warden's purse. In another second it was as empty as when he left Shoe Lane. The unfortunate scene-shifter stared at the gift, as well he might: but, not having the same scruples as Félix, did not for a moment refuse it. He was about to express his gratitude, when Barton interrupted him.

"Damn you!" he said, fiercely, "if you say a word I'll pitch you among the bricks. Come," he said to Félix—"come and drink. That infernal prig Warden made me mix my liquors last night. A bad habit, that—it makes one so dry in the morning. What shall it be? The customary small beer? Or what do you favour on such occasions? I myself always take a hair of the dog." So saying he took Félix by the arm, and led him to a bar close by, to which the fire had brought a considerable increase of custom.

Barton asked for brandy, and made his companion have some also, whether he would or no. Then he had some more. Then he entered into general conversation with the other customers, and treated them liberally, never forgetting himself. At last he put his hand into his pocket in order to pay.

"By the daughters of Danaus!" he said to Félix, "cleaned out again! Just lend me half-a-crown, will you?"

Félix felt in his, also: but he knew beforehand that the search would be vain, and so it proved.

"No good, is it? Never mind. Just step outside, and when you see me come out, do as I do. Tom—another go."

The barman turned to execute the order: and scarcely had Félix passed the door when Barton dashed out at full speed, calling to him to follow. He did so mechanically, until his new friend, having dodged round several corners, suddenly stopped, and broke into a boisterous laugh.

"Give me your hand," he said; "we're brothers, though you *are* a Frenchman. I always swear brotherhood with a man whose pockets are empty. Bad policy, no doubt: but I never knew a good fellow yet who hadn't empty pockets, or a man with empty pockets who wasn't a good fellow, in one way

or another. I think we gave them a good view of our heels just now. Well, well—it won't hurt them for once: I've paid them many a long score in my time. But I say, old fellow, I am positively cleaned out. My name's Barton,—called Dick Barton by his few friends, and something else Barton, which I won't tell you, by his many enemies—of whom some say he is himself the worst. But that's neither here nor there. What's yours?"

"Félix Créville."

"All right. I like to know what a man likes to be called. For the rest, the fewer questions one asks any man the better. Where shall we go now? I feel prodigiously inclined for a steak: but my credit's run dry just now. How are you off for that useful commodity?"

It was lucky for Félix that he was quick at guessing, for Barton's English was not well suited to unpractised foreign ears. "I know no place," he answered.

"I thought every fiddler got tick as a matter of course—as drunk as a fiddler, you know, all over the world: that's because a fiddler can get his liquor for a tune, and can drink all day long if he likes for nothing. But, as you don't know any place, we must use our wits, that's all. One can't stand here

for ever. Talking of standing, a good thought! Let's take to the road."

"To the road?" asked Félix, puzzled.

"Yes: cry 'Stand and deliver!'—gentlemen in distress, you know—ha, ha, ha! Claude Duval was your countryman, wasn't he? Any way, Turpin was mine—and a namesake too, by the way. Which shall it be—Hounslow or the Scrubbs? Any way *we* shall be safe, whichever way we go. '*Cantabit vacuus coram latrone viator.*'"

Certainly if Félix had at first fancied that he had found a millionaire, he was sufficiently undeceived. But his heart also was apt to warm to an empty pocket: it certainly warmed towards one who had shown himself so free-handed when his pocket had been full.

"I am myself without a *sou*—without a penny," he said, "and I do not know how to get one. And I must leave my lodging: my landlady will need to be paid. But I have yet a piece of bread in the cupboard, and perhaps part of a sausage——"

"Well, you *are* a good fellow, though you do call yourself a gentleman! I consent. I'll eat half your bread and a quarter of your sausage: for needs must when the devil drives. And then, why, we'll go forth and conquer or die, like brothers in arms.

What else have you got besides the bread and sausage?"

"Nothing."

"I don't mean to eat, you know. A watch, for instance?"

"No."

"Nor I. Furniture?"

"No."

"Nor I. Books? No? Nor I, bar my old Horace—but that's to be buried with me. But, damn it, man, you must have something. Everybody has something. How many shirts have you?"

Félix stared considerably, and coloured also—for his wardrobe was by no means extensive. "How many shirts?" he repeated.

"Yes, how many shirts—more than one, I mean? Two?"

"I have two."

"*Bene!* One more than I have. Good condition?"

"Nearly new."

"Then, *Optime!* My one is not, by any manner of means. What else have you?"

"Some music——"

"Not worth a straw."

"A hat——"

"Not worth two straws. Hats never are. Well?"

"A valise——"

"That'll do!"

"And that's all."

"And your violin? Ah, I forgot. That fire last night was like Mantua—*nimum vicina Cremonæ*. All right. One valise, one shirt—that'll serve for to-day, with strict management: and hang to-morrow! Where do you live?"

The question was a breach of the etiquette that considerately treats as a sacred mystery the dwelling-place of a man who has confessed himself to be without what is even more necessary than a dwelling-place. But Félix answered it.

"Come, then. Let us first consume the bread and sausage. What luxury! to keep two whole shirts all at once. Lead on. I am devilishly ready for that bread and sausage. Well, well, such is life—grilled bones and port last night, to-day a mouthful of sausage and—porter. Positive yesterday, comparative to-day, perhaps to-morrow superlative—who knows? Any way, I suppose that at least the comparative goes, as you say in France, *song dire?*"

"I am afraid it does not, though. I have shown you the limit of my hospitality."

"Then a mouthful of sausage and thirst. For

your noblest element, as some philosophic ass called it, I have a certain dislike that I cannot overcome: or rather, I have such reverence for it that I would put it to no such profane use as that of drinking. I shall die, sir, as my grandfather before me."

"And how was that?"

"Sir, my grandfather was an honest north-country farmer, who entertained that reverence for water which I inherit. I may say, in passing, that I inherit nothing else, except the name of Barton. He was a fine old fellow. I was not born in Lilliput, as you see: but he would have beaten me by a head and neck. One evening, after market-day, he was thrown, or possibly he fell without being thrown, from his horse upon the road, face downward. He was perfectly conscious, however, and found that his face had fallen upon a rut, in which lay two table-spoonfuls of yesterday's rain—just enough, in fact, and no more, to cover his lips and his nostrils. Sir, in order to breathe as freely as you or I, he had only to suck up that water and swallow it—it would not have been more than half a mouthful. But no. 'Not a drop of water have I drunk these sixty years,' he says to himself, 'and I won't bring shame on my grey hairs by beginning now.' Sir, the consequence was that he was literally drowned in those two table-

spoonfuls of water, a martyr to principle. I hope I shall not choke myself with your sausage : but if I do, may I not prove unworthy of my descent from my great ancestor. And so—but here we are.”

After having disposed of the contents of the cupboard, Barton took the valise and the shirt to the nearest pawnbrokers. Presently he returned, threw down a shilling or two upon the table, and then, by their side, set two bottles of brandy that he had procured with the remainder of the few shillings that he had raised.

“ And now,” he said, “ we’ll make a night of it ! ”

CHAPTER V.

It was in company with this strange specimen of a tribe of Bohemia with which Parisian experience had not brought him in contact, that Félix was introduced to those extreme depths to which allusion was made in the last chapter. That men do somehow manage to exist in those depths without actually drowning is certain : but how they do it is a mystery even to themselves. At one time they only had one coat between them, so that when one had occasion to go out, the other had to stay at home. For income, Félix managed to earn a few shillings from time to time by copying music, and Barton displayed great genius in the borrowing of half-crowns : but then the latter were generally absorbed by brandy before they reached the common purse. At last even this unsatisfactory method of supply came to an end : for the world will not keep on lending half-crowns for ever. The most intimate friendship will not

stand it: and Barton was not a man who made intimate friends. And then the brandy began to run dry also—and then Barton, having slept through three miserable days, without eating or speaking, woke up, and said,—

“I say, old fellow, this will never do. I’ve stayed with you because I liked you, and because you offered to share your last bite with me, and because I thought I could help you up again: and here have I been knocking under to this damned liquor, as usual. It won’t do, and shan’t. You’re a damned good fellow, and I’m a beast—that’s the fact. So I’ve been thinking what could be done. I thought I might go back to Cambridge, and take pupils—I don’t suppose they’ve forgotten my iambics there yet. But then I know I should infallibly come to grief there again, just as I did before: and, upon my soul! I don’t think I could stand the place now, any more than the place could stand me then. So then I thought of literature. I’ve done a little in that line already: and I know I could do well enough if I could only stick to work. So let me have the coat this morning, old fellow. I’ll go and call upon a man I know at the ‘Trumpet,’ and one or two places. I must get hold of a nip of brandy somehow, just to screw me up to my day’s work, or else I

shouldn't be able to say a word to any one: but, bar that, I swear I won't touch a drop for another three days—unless it's absolutely necessary, as it is now."

In this way did he talk when he was sober. But as soon as he did get some work from the 'Trumpet,' and had been paid for it, not another stroke of work would he do till the coin was spent, and he had slept himself sober again.

But editors and publishers, used as they were to this kind of thing in the good old Grub Street days, still could not be expected to stand it any more than other employers of labour when it prevented the labour being done. Barton's work was admirable, and even excellent: but he soon began to find that less and less was required of him, until at last he found himself once more on his last legs, and once more with nothing to drink.

Félix meanwhile toiled like a slave, and sought for toil like a free man. But though the want of energy and self-command, which in Barton amounted almost to a disease for which he could not be held responsible, are doomed to fail, it does not follow that sobriety and industry, and willingness both to find work and to do it, are doomed to succeed. Félix was overwhelmed by the destiny that had

mated him with such a companion. Why, then, in the name of that destiny, did he not free himself from the burden of one who had no claim upon him, any more than he had upon Barton? They were a strange pair to find themselves in this situation together. It is true that both were Bohemians—but this was the only similarity: and Bohemianism is not a quality that makes all who profess it necessarily brothers. And yet these two, diametrically opposite as were their characters and circumstances, in all respects save one, had now been living together for weeks as though they had been far more than brothers—that is to say, as though they had been friends. At first, no doubt, Félix had been to a certain extent passive in the matter, and had rather submitted to than sought the companionship of a man whom he could not in the least understand. It was not likely that the French musician, who knew nothing of the world save its artistic side, and that in an un-English fashion, could comprehend, far less appreciate, one to whom the artistic side of the world was wholly non-existent: who classed all musicians under the generic title, which he always used contemptuously, of “Fiddlers”: whose whole soul seemed to be absorbed in Greek, of which his com-

panion had no knowledge—and in getting brutally drunk, with which he had no sympathy. Still he not only endured this comradeship, but could not help feeling a sort of real affection for the comrade in his difficulties whom chance had given him. Besides, every man has his follies: and Félix, most assuredly, had great ones. For instance, he knew perfectly well that, had Dick Barton actually been the millionaire for whom he had at first taken him, as many of the million pounds as he pleased would have been his own: and that the same would have been the case had it been a question of sharing, not a million pounds, but two farthings. So he committed the folly of taking the will for the deed. Again, it was part of his Bohemian gospel that a man is quite justified in turning his back upon a prosperous friend, but that to desert even a chance comrade when he is down in the world is as base a thing as a man can well do. So he committed the wild folly of standing by Dick Barton, as he felt sure that Dick Barton stood by him in point of goodwill. And so it was that he had, in effect, to strive his best to make work, which was insufficient to support one, support two—if, indeed, Barton can be held to count for no more than one. As for Barton's motives, who can or need ascribe motives

good or bad to such a man? And, after all, far stranger relations between men spring up than this — not, perhaps, in respectable society, where they associate according to form and rule, but certainly in that vague and ill-defined outside world in which they go against form and rule by preference.

But still, bravely as Félix toiled, and bravely as Barton talked of toiling, it was not long before the two friends fell into so deplorable a condition, that a day or two at most must inevitably see them numbered among the lodgers of the *hôtel à la belle étoile*.

"I say, old fellow, this will never do," said Barton once more, as he instinctively reached out his hand to where the bottle of brandy ought—or rather ought not—to have been.

Félix looked up from his copying. Assuredly no one could have recognised in the worn face, with its pale colour, sunken cheeks, and dim eyes, the development either of the peasant of the Jura or of the Parisian art-student. His coming to London had proved a wild-goose chase indeed, and something worse.

"The London press is in the hands of idiots," Barton went on. "I could conduct it all single-

handed ten times as well as it is conducted now: and they know it. And yet they won't throw me enough work to keep body and soul together. The fact is, I'm too good for them. I should rout out their damned cliques, and frighten the fools out of whatever they have in the place of their wits. The fact is, a man should never be quite so clever as his employers, and I'm a long stretch cleverer than mine. Upon my soul, I think I shall enlist: and if I get run through or knocked on the head by one of your damned Frenchmen—why, so much the better for Dick Barton. 'Here lies Dick Barton, who never did anything because he did everything too well—"*Nepioi, oude isasin hosu pleon hemisu pantos*"': that'll do for an epitaph. By the way, I've got to go to the theatre to-night."

"The theatre?"

"Yes—for the 'Trumpet.' 'To such base uses may we come at last!' I, who have criticised Sophocles, am now to criticise Jones!"

"What is the play?"

"Hell knows. Something musical—that's all I know. But I've got the bill somewhere."

"Musical—and they send you?"

"That's the very reason, I suppose. If it had been a new edition of Sophocles they'd have sent

it to you. But, after all, what does it matter? A tune's a tune, and a song's a song, I suppose."

"Not quite, I should say."

"Well, I confess I never saw any difference between one tune and another. But it can only be asses that read musical criticisms: and it's easy enough to tickle their long ears somehow, so that they mayn't find out one's ignorance. That's my whole theory of the matter."

"And a very detestable one too."

"Not at all. Cast not your pearls before swine, as somebody or other says somewhere. But it's time I was off. Where's the coat?—oh, blast it!"

No wonder that he began to swear, for the coat, which had once been the undivided property of Félix, required the most tender and delicate handling to adapt itself to the big frame of Barton: and now, with a sudden cry, as it were, it split from tail to collar, and became an undivided coat, in any sense, no more.

Barton first looked ruefully at the result of his attempt, and then burst into a loud laugh. The misfortune was serious, but was not, at the same time, without its comic element.

"There!" he went on; "what in the devil's name is to be done now? One can't get mine out

of pawn to-night, that's certain — nor to-morrow, unless I write this review. I know—give me one of those pens, and a scrap of your paper. The music-paper will do—it'll look all the better. I'll give you another lesson in the art of criticism."

He placed the play-bill before him and began to write with his usual rapidity.

"There," he said at the end of about half an hour, during which Félix had been wearily proceeding with his copying—"There, I think that'll do for the swine. Just see that I haven't made any technical blunders, or called anything by a wrong name."

So Félix read, "' — *Theatre*. Last night this house reopened under the able and enterprising management of Mr Green——'"

"A manager is always able and enterprising," interrupted Barton, "just as a critic is always 'able and impartial,' a suicide 'a rash act,' and a fire 'the devouring element.' That's only common form business. Go on."

"'For performances in which the highest class of music is to hold a distinguished place.'"

"That's a quotation from the bill. Go on."

"'With this view we are glad to find that he has engaged the services of that eminent Parisian composer, Monsieur Louis Prosper' — *Grand Dieu!*

Prosper! *Est-il possible?*" And Félix leaped suddenly from his seat.

"Why, what's wrong?" asked Barton. "It's all out of the bill, so far."

"Wrong? On the contrary it is all right! Here—give me the coat—fasten it together anyhow—I go to the theatre instead of you."

"What—and write the review?"

"Bah! Never mind the review: that'll keep now. You may be an 'able and impartial critic'—but you touch not that which regards Louis Prosper."

"What—is he a friend of yours? Is he good for half-a-crown?"

"For something better, I hope, than your half-a-crown!"

And so, from his bare and miserable garret, without a shirt to his back, which was covered only by the rags of what had once been a coat, but which now consisted of little more than rents and pins, the Marquis de Croisville went forth to apply for aid to the Jew fiddler, who was at that moment ruling his orchestra with a jewelled hand.

CHAPTER VI.

NEITHER, therefore, of the lovers of Mademoiselle Angélique Lefort was just now in a flourishing condition, inasmuch as one was within an ace of starvation, and the other had a bullet in his body, at about as inconvenient a season as can well be imagined.

Mr Prescott, Lieutenant Mountain, Captain Seward, and the surgeon himself, who had acquired considerable experience of gunshot wounds, not only in the Peninsula and the Low Countries, but in such more accessible and scarcely less instructive places as Chalk Farm and Wormwood Scrubbs, were unanimous in thinking that Hugh Lester would never open his eyes again.

Those were not the days when mere bare human life, even if bought at the price of honour, was considered among those who did regard honour as being of any very great value in itself: and had such an opinion yet acquired its full force, none of these four,

who had seen death in many forms, would have necessarily been much, if at all, affected by the sight of one dead body the more. Not one of them would have refused to risk his own life in a similar encounter a hundred times if necessary. Prescott had killed his man at least once before : and the other three had seen death wholesale, in the hospital and in the field. Not one was in the least likely to be troubled with morbid misgivings about the termination of any meeting between gentlemen, however lamentable it might be. But, nevertheless, not one felt very much at ease with himself just now. It was not good to see this young man, who but a minute ago had been full of health and high spirit, with a long and prosperous and, to all appearance, happy life before him, suddenly sent out of the world for having been guilty of an excess of chivalry. Remorse is of course too strong a word : but certainly Mr Prescott did feel that his satisfaction had been unsatisfactory. He would not indeed have retired from the contest even in order to recall his opponent to life, for to give up a contest was not in his nature : but he would willingly have paid a great many thousand pounds, and, as men go, it is something to be willing to do even so much, and, if one has the great many thousand pounds to give, the will to give them is a great deal more than something.

In fact, he did what he could by accompanying the unconscious form of his late opponent to the public-house which was not far off, and where it was laid upon a bed until it should be removed to Earl's Dene. Then he went away with Lieutenant Mountain : for, though he had no serious consequences to apprehend for himself, it was still necessary that he should at least leave the immediate neighbourhood for the present.

It was of course upon Captain Seward that devolved the most difficult duty of all—that of telling Miss Clare that she was now childless indeed. He would rather have been the principal in any number of duels, but it had to be done : and besides, he had in his keeping those last five letters of his own principal, of which one was for her. So he drove himself, not too quickly, back to Earl's Dene, and asked to see Miss Clare privately.

In all the world there is no more formidable task than to have to tell a woman of the unexpected death of one whom she loves. At all events Captain Seward thought so now : for he had never seen Miss Clare before, and did not know how she took things—that is to say, whether she would faint or scream, or merely burst into tears.

"Miss Clare," he said, with as much sympathy as

he could manage, "I am Captain Seward of the—th—at Redchester, you know. Could you prepare yourself for news—you know—most painful—in fact—if you could—it would be better."

She bowed, as a sign that she was ready to hear it, whatever it might prove to be.

The gallant Captain began to stammer again. At last,

"Damn it, madam," he burst out: "my friend Hugh Lester—there has been a meeting—and——"

Miss Clare neither fainted nor screamed nor burst into tears.

"You mean a duel?" she only asked, though in a fever of fear.

"It couldn't be helped, indeed, I assure you. I did my best—as his friend you know—but——"

Miss Clare suddenly stepped forward, and grasped the mantelpiece, partly to support herself—partly because her hands needed to clutch something.

"And he is dead!" she said.

Seward remained silent, and only hung down his head. Thus he did not see that violent grasp of the hand, nor the trembling of the lines of the mouth, which belied the hard coldness of the words which he heard.

"I need not ask if he was in the right, or how

he behaved," she continued, in the same strange tone, after a pause.

"Admirably."

"Then——"

She said no more, but only showed by a slight gesture that she wished to be alone.

"What a monster of a woman!" thought Captain Seward to himself as, having silently laid the letter upon the table before her, he left the room and the house. But he was wrong, as he would have owned could he have read her heart. It is the calm and stern woman who is to be pitied when a sudden blow falls upon her far more than her who is able to find relief in hysterics. Unfortunately, however, this is not the order in which compassion is bestowed: and men forget that the fullest heart is always the last to overflow.

"Am I never to expiate my sin?" she thought bitterly. "Am I ever to prove a curse to those whom I love most?—and Hugh——"

Then she did break down: and Captain Seward would have called her monster no more. But she was one who would have died rather than shed a tear in the sight of a stranger. Reserve with her was both a habit and an instinct, even in grief, as is often the case with those whose pride is genuine

and not mere affectation. It is terribly pathetic, this proud modesty of soul, which is ashamed even in the sight of sympathy.

Of course the ill news had reached Earl's Dene of itself as soon as, if not before, it had been brought officially by Captain Seward. The external coldness of Madam Clare was certainly not imitated either by her guest or by her household. On the contrary, the one, without giving herself time to think or to realise, rushed to the side of her hostess, and the others into the wildest confusion. The kitchen amply made up, in the matter of hysterics, for what was wanting in the drawing-room. But Miss Raymond's impulse to console her friend was balked. Madam Clare was invisible even to her. She was reading the letter that Hugh had addressed to her before he fell.

It was a dreadful revelation to her, from which not even her infinite sorrow could take away the bitterness of disappointment: and when she learned, as the reader will have guessed, that her nephew was still living, her infinite joy was unable to make her forget what she had felt in her sorrow.

And so it was for this that she had toiled and taken much thought, and done her duty in her station, and made friends and foes, and fought hard, and spent

the wealth of her affection—which was none the less plentiful, because the treasure-house was old—for this, that the glory of Earl's Dene should pass into the hands of a girl little above the rank of a servant, who intended to go upon the stage, and who was a Frenchwoman and a Papist to boot! She was quite as prejudiced now as she had been in her rather wild youth: it was only the direction of her prejudices that was changed. And then, too, she was unconsciously put out by finding that the penetration of which she was so proud had been at fault all along: that she had been suspecting Marie, while the true enemy had been Angélique. But worst of all was the feeling that Hugh himself had deceived her in the matter.

It was not that, like some mothers, she foolishly and vainly grieved at finding out that she held only the second place in her son's affection. She was much too wise and sensible for that. On the contrary, she wished to see him married before she died, and she wished him to choose one whom he could love. But then she was much too fond of managing everything and everybody, not to wish to manage that most important matter with her own hands. If Hugh had only seen fit to fall in love with the heir-

ess of New Court, she would have been more than satisfied : and this for several reasons, one of which was altogether new.

An election in those days was not a cheap amusement. No one except Mr White and Madam Clare had the least idea of what had to be spent upon the contest for Denethorp. Of course it had been the policy of the Yellows to make it a battle of purses, seeing that that of their champion was on the whole the best supplied : and Miss Clare's, though long, was not inexhaustible. Her unencumbered estate had for the first time to learn what is meant by a mortgage : and the thought vexed Miss Clare's soul, who had set her heart upon leaving it to her heir in as free a condition as she had herself received it. Now New Court "marched" with Earl's Dene. Even had the owner of the former not personally been an eligible match, the two properties seemed made to be married : and how could the pecuniary wounds received during the contest be more satisfactorily cured ?

So much for the state of Miss Clare's mind during the weary time that passed while Hugh lay in the delirium of the fever caused by his wound, and utterly incapable of taking the least interest in what was going on among either his friends or his

foes. Of course Miss Raymond quitted Earl's Dene as soon as possible, and carried off her companion with her, who left Denethorp willingly. Nothing more could be done there now: and, should Hugh finally recover, the letter that had been delivered to her by Captain Seward would prove by no means a bad card in the game that she was playing with Fortune and Miss Clare.

Meanwhile, in spite of Hugh's condition, his friends by no means slackened their exertions in his behalf. On the contrary, they worked all the harder for their wounded chief, out of whose bullet they coined plenty of telling points. Of course, Warden now came to the front more than ever, if possible: and at last, when the day came, to the surprise of none but to the frantic disappointment of many, the poll closed with an undoubted majority in favour of Mr Lester. Thanks mainly to the doctor's son, Earl's Dene had held its own.

But still it was a tame and unexciting end to that long and exciting canvass. Neither candidate was present to make his final speech: to chair the conqueror in his present state was of course out of the question: and the beauty, fashion, and royalty of Earl's Dene put in no appearance. Mark Warden from the balcony of the King's Head had to receive

on the part of his friend both the cheers of the Blues and the rotten eggs of the Yellows.

Now, it will doubtless be remembered that the partisans of the latter colour formed the strongest mob, and that they included the mill-hands almost to a man. Under a system of universal suffrage Prescott would have been returned triumphantly. It may, therefore, be readily imagined that, although Mark Warden represented the victor, the rotten eggs were far more plentiful than the cheers, seeing that the losing was the popular side. Had Hugh Lester been able to show himself, and had Alice Raymond been there to fill the market-place with the glory of her smile and of her blue ribbons, and had Madam Clare had the good sense not to accompany her, the Yellows would, in all probability, have taken their beating pretty well: for they liked Hugh personally, and the smile of a pretty girl has its influence even with a mob. But as things stood, smarting as they were under the sting of defeat, deprived of any ordinary way of letting off their rage, and with no spectacle of triumph to amuse them, the beer with which they were filled to repletion turned sour, and things began to look ill for the peace of the town.

But an English mob is slow to ferment. So long as Mark Warden was endeavouring from the balcony

to thank the electors of Denethorp in the name of his friend Mr Lester for having stood so well by Church and State, and to congratulate the town generally upon its new representative, his hearers contented themselves with drowning his voice in a torrent of groans for himself, for Lester, and, above all, for Madam Clare, and of cheers for Prescott, and by assiduously pelting him with eggs, potatoes, and the other missiles in use on such occasions, till he was obliged to make a final bow and retire. But, when this little piece of vengeance was over and there was nothing external to itself to engage its attention, the crowd was thrown upon its own resources.

It is rather a strong remark to make about anything, seeing how many hideous things there are in the world, but still, on the whole, it may fairly be said that the most hideous of all is an angry mob. It is literally a thing, or rather a monster: for it ceases to be made up of men with distinct personalities of their own. Even in the dullest and quietest of places an angry mob at once takes the guise of its fellows in the great cities of the world. All are alike—alike in stupidity, in madness and in brutality: and while an English mob is certainly not worse than those of other countries, it is cer-

tainly not better—except in the matter of garlic. Now the Mayor of Denethorp happened to be a man of sense, and, not liking the look of things—for he had heard that the malcontents of Denethorp had been reinforced by some roughs from Redchester and by some more dangerous roughs from B—— himself who had scented carrion from afar, with the strange instinct of their kind—he sent an express to the Redchester barracks to ask for the loan of a troop of dragoons for the night, and then went home to entertain some of the leading Conservatives at a dinner of triumph and congratulation. Mark Warden did not remain to enjoy his hospitality, however, but hurried off at once to Earl's Dene. By degrees all the respectable inhabitants of the place had left the streets: and the worse portion of the crowd was left to itself.

After a few drunken fights had taken place, a few black eyes been given, and a few of those who dared to wear the colours of victory knocked down and well kicked and trampled upon, the signal for mischief was given by a very small boy, who, for mere fun, threw a stone through one of the windows in the front of the King's Head. In another minute the inn had not a window left unbroken. After this glorious achievement the mob,

with a cheer of triumph, marched into the High Street, and performed the same operation upon the shops and houses at first of those who were known to be Tories, and afterwards indiscriminately. At the end of the High Street it turned to the left, and soon afterwards, finding itself in front of Mr Warden's house, repeated the performance upon its windows also, including that which Lorry had at last remembered to have mended only the very day before. The brass plate was of course torn off, and far greater damage would, in all probability, have been done, had not some one in the crowd suddenly cried out,

"To Market Street! Let's knock up Lester's French drab!"

It was a suggestion exactly calculated to charm a mob already heated with easy triumphs. To attack a young girl and a weak old man is exactly the sport in which such a Hydra revels, when its blood is well up. With an evil shout and a final discharge at the house of the surgeon, who was dining with the Mayor while poor Lorry was trembling in the coal-hole, the crowd turned, and almost ran to Market Street.

"Twenty-three!" called out a dozen of its voices, and it stopped.

But the hospitality of the Mayor had by this time been broken into by the news of what was going on in the town. He was by no means a man of commanding presence, nor did he possess too much courage: but no one could say of him afterwards, as has sometimes been said of mayors on similar occasions, that he did not at all events try to do his duty like a man. He had already sent a second express to Redchester, to hurry the dragoons, and now, attended by many of his guests, he gained the window of a house opposite to No. 23 by entering through the back-door, and attempted to make himself heard.

But it was not likely that he should succeed in doing what Mark Warden had failed to do. His second word was drowned by a yell, and by a crash of stones upon the house of the bootmaker who was so unfortunate as to have the Leforts for lodgers. The situation was so dangerous that the Mayor retired from his exposed position, and small blame to him.

But Monsieur Lefort came forward to his own window. Mrs Price had been far more formidable to this French gentleman than all the *canaille* of the town could possibly be. He turned very pale, indeed: but it was because of the insulting shouts that

reached Marie's ears as well as his own. Having sent his daughter, who, brave as she was, was certainly not too brave to tremble, with the two children into a back room, he went straight to the window and displayed to the crowd below the barrel of some ancient weapon of the blunderbuss order.

As an answer to this piece of bravado went up a roar, half of anger, half of laughter: and then a stone went up also, sufficiently well aimed to hit the old Frenchman on the shoulder.

The sting of the stone roused up the spirit of combat in him who felt it. Hitherto he had been a gentleman defying *canaille*, and a father defending his children: but now he was a Frenchman who had received a blow. He retired at once from the window, but it was only to fill his weapon with powder and ball.

"Let's rout out the lot of 'em!" cried some one.

The mob answered with a confused burlesque of the shouts of the hunting field, and a charge was made at the street-door of the house, which, barred and bolted as it was, could not resist the rush for long. In a minute or two it gave way, and the two or three men who were immediately pressing against it were sent flying into the entrance passage, and, in a second, trampled under the feet of their followers.

The shop was soon in the wildest disorder, and a few of the invaders, eager for mischief, were beginning to mount the stairs. Marie was on her knees, praying to saints and angels with all her strength: the bootmaker and his wife had followed the example of Lorry.

Suddenly the sound of a shot was heard, and then a cry from the street.

Marie sprang from her knees in wild alarm: and the mob was hushed for an instant into silence. But only for an instant: for in another there went up to the skies such a roar as Denethorp had never heard. Stones flew like hail and at random, many recoiling upon the heads of those who threw them. Meanwhile not a few of the rioters, discontented with this barren mode of attack, rushed into the house itself, and were, little by little, and step by step, forcing those who had already entered it up the stairs. It seemed only a question of time whether the second storey itself should be reached: whether Marie's own room should be invaded by this horrible tide.

It was a terrible moment. But, thank heaven, "when bale is hext, boot is next"—so it is always. The longing ears of the Mayor were at last gladdened by the sound of the galloping of hoofs upon

the hard pavement, and by the ring of steel. In another instant, the end of the street that opened upon the market-place was filled with a welcome vision of shining helmets and scarlet coats and drawn swords.

“Halt!”

The sharp word of command rang through the street, and the coward heart of the Hydra shrank and shrivelled. Captain Seward, who was in command of the troop, leaving his men where they were, rode forward alone through the crowd, as coolly and carelessly as if it had consisted of so much brushwood, towards the house where the Mayor was beckoning on him from the window: and not a man opposed his passage. It is nonsense to say that an English mob has any peculiar respect for the law. But it has a peculiar fear of the law when reminded of its strength by the sight of a sword or a truncheon: and this goes far to supply the want of respect. Before the officer had reached the door the street was empty.

All was well, then, after all, except for the breaking of glass—and, as his son-in-law was a glazier—well, it's an ill wind that blows nobody good!

So thought the Mayor, as he shook hands with Captain Seward. But so did not think Marie.

Poor Monsieur Lefort, too proud to leave the window, had been struck on the temple during that last wild storm of stones; and, when she emerged from her own room, she found him dead.

CHAPTER VII.

HUGH's wound had left him in a very feeble state of convalescence, so that he was now just in that condition which a woman, however much of manliness she may have in her character, is likely to fix upon as giving her a good opportunity for bringing a man to task, and in which a man is no match for the weakest of women. For it is impossible to rebel against an affectionate nurse, even were it not a trouble: and, when a Madam Clare is the nurse, and a Hugh Lester the patient, the impossibility is more impossible still.

"Hugh," she said to him two or three days after he had left his bed, "you must have been expecting me to talk to you."

He summoned up all the energy that Mr Prescott and two doctors had left him among them, for he knew what was coming.

"I hope," she went on, "that your illness has given you an opportunity of considering?"

He waited for her to continue.

"At least, if you have not considered, I hope you will now."

"I have considered it," he said.

"I am glad of that. And now we shall understand each other once more."

"Aunt," he answered, "I am afraid you do not understand."

"But you had considered the matter, did you not say?"

"I have," he said gravely—he had become very much graver of late, independently of his illness—"and—I am not changed."

"What? Is it—can it be still possible——"

"Am I not engaged to her?"

"Engaged! You must be infatuated."

"But what objection——"

"What objection? I wonder you can ask such a question."

"She is a lady."

"No, Hugh—she is not a lady: and, if she were, that has nothing to do with it. I cannot argue such an absurd question."

"My dear aunt——"

"No. I do not call her a lady who has acted as she has done."

"And how has she acted? What has she done?"

"Hugh, your folly goes beyond all bound."

"I will not argue with you, aunt. You do not know her."

"Nor do you, it seems."

"But even if I did not trust her, as I do, and even if I did not—love her, she has my word. And now, too, that she has no friend but me—now that she has lost her only protector, and lost him on my account——"

"Is the successful candidate bound to marry every girl who loses her protector in an election riot? Surely you are talking the wildest folly. You cannot love her—it is impossible. It is a boy's fancy, of which you ought to be ashamed."

"It is no boy's fancy, aunt. And it is a question of honour, too. I could not give her up, even if I would."

"Oh, Hugh—remember that we are mother and son. If you did but know——"

She took his hand in hers, with a greater show of affection than he had ever witnessed in her. Tenderness is a better weapon of attack than pride: and he was moved.

"My dear aunt—my dearest mother—I do know—I do remember. But I know also that I am doing what is right, and that you will acknowledge that I am doing what is right in the end. You cannot ask me to give up, to break my word to her I love when she is most helpless. In this I cannot obey you, nor could you wish me to. In everything else——"

"Yes," she said, excitedly, "in everything but in what concerns the most important step in your whole life—in everything but just where I require your obedience most! That is not trust—that is not obedience. Hugh, if you persist in this folly of yours, we cannot be as we have always been—and I shall care about nothing any more. If you have a right to choose who shall be your wife, I have a right to choose who shall be my daughter. Decide between her and me. I will speak no more about it now: and I pray that you may see things in a better light."

And so the conversation ended for the present, leaving Miss Clare angry and her nephew exhausted. Neither recurred to the subject for some days: on the contrary, both studiously avoided it. But the truce was hollow, and both alike felt that the great struggle was to come. Miss Clare was perfectly

sincere in saying that she would be infinitely distressed by a breach between herself and her nephew: she would have been right had she said that it would have rendered her heart-broken. It would be far better for her that he had died than that they should become estranged. But to give way was a thing of which she was incapable. She had never given way to anybody in her life: and it was much too late to begin now, whatever distress her obstinacy might cause herself or any one else. Besides, she thought with equal sincerity that it was her bounden duty not to let Hugh and Earl's Dene go to the destruction that she was sure must needs spring from so gross a *mésalliance*.

"Hugh," she accordingly said to him a day or two before he was to leave for London, "I suppose you will be seeing Alice Raymond again before very long?"

"Oh, I shall call there at once, of course. Have you any message for her?"

"I will give you a letter for her. What a dear girl she is! I got quite to look upon her as my other child."

Hugh let this pass, and said nothing.

"She will make an admirable wife—and she is so unspoiled and unaffected. So different from most other girls."

Hugh began to hum a tune mildly.

"Do you not think so, Hugh?"

"I think she is a charming girl indeed, aunt."

"It is not every day that one finds a pretty girl so natural and so amiable—so good. How delightful it would be if you took it into your head to ask her to be my daughter indeed. But perhaps you have taken it into your head already? If so——"

She spoke almost appealingly, and with a forced smile. Hugh felt the weight of her suggestion, in spite of its having been made so wholly without tact: for, as has been said, he felt to the full the influence of all family and social traditions, and it had always been the part of Earl's Dene, like "*Felix Austria*," to increase itself by marriage. But he was now under the influence of something much stronger than family and social tradition.

"But the lady herself might have something to say to that arrangement," he answered, as lightly as he could.

Miss Clare's face brightened a little, with a faint ray of hope.

"Nothing unpleasant," she replied. "I do not fancy that you, at least, would find the lady of New Court very cruel."

He saw that his manner had somehow given her a

wrong impression, which it was his duty to correct at once, especially as it was evident that her suggestion had been made seriously and in full earnest.

"Aunt," he said, gravely, "you know that such a thing is quite impossible."

"Indeed I do not know it. Why should it be impossible? You are both nearly of an age, both of nearly equal position—the advantage being yours in both cases—you both have the same tastes, you like each other—why in the world should it be impossible?"

Hugh was silent; but his silence expressed his thought only too well.

"You do not mean, of course," she went on, in a low and constrained voice, "that you are still indulging in any folly about—about her servant?"

"About Miss Lefort, you mean? I do not consider it folly."

Miss Clare was silent in her turn. The inevitable battle was about to begin.

"What you say is impossible," he continued. "I cannot ask Miss Raymond to be my wife. I am not free: and I would not be free even if I could."

"And"—this scornfully—"can you possibly imagine that I should open my arms and receive Miss Lefort as a daughter?"

"I had hoped so—I hope still that you will."

"You have lost your senses. I will not see you acting so madly without doing what I can to prevent it. Earl's Dene shall never come to this girl."

Hugh understood this threat—for it was nothing less than a threat to himself—perfectly well. But he was nothing if not chivalrous. He certainly could not give up Angélique now: and even Miss Clare felt that by her last speech she had managed to put herself in the wrong.

"Aunt, I am indeed sorry that you are so prejudiced against Angélique—against Miss Lefort. But when a man's whole happiness is concerned——"

"That is nonsense. A *man's* whole happiness does not depend upon such things, although a *boy* may think so."

"Mine does, however."

"I did not think you were such a slave to your fancies."

"This is not a fancy."

"You are determined, then?"

"Quite."

"Then listen, Hugh." The tears forced themselves into her eyes. "I am not angry with you. Of course I know perfectly well that I have no real right to prevent your marrying a beggar out of the street, or

worse: but I have a right to object to know your wife, and to do with Earl's Dene what I please. As long as nothing happens I shall be the same to you as I have always been: but if I hear of your committing this wicked folly, I will see you no more, and the place must go to strangers. No—not to strangers: Alice Raymond shall in any case be mistress of Earl's Dene. It will not be the first time of its going from woman to woman. Now we understand each other, I hope?"

"My dear aunt, let the land go as it will. But let us be friends." He was not eloquent by nature, and he was moved more than he cared to show.

"We cannot, as long as you persist in your folly."

"Then—if it must be so——"

"Say nothing, Hugh. Think quietly of what I say."

"I have thought."

"I cannot think so. I will never mention this subject to you again, and hope never to hear it mentioned. I am not angry, as you see—but I am quite firm."

So ended the second conversation, in which Miss Clare had certainly proved that tact was anything but her strong point. Nevertheless, her policy had not been undiplomatic. She knew enough of Hugh

to know that he was too honest to let Angélique marry him in ignorance as to his circumstances and prospects, and enough of the world to feel pretty certain that Angélique would not marry him if she was not left in ignorance about them. Her threat had been aimed at Angélique rather than at Hugh : and she doubted not but that it would at once drive her enemy from the field.

CHAPTER VIII.

It is always as well, at least once in the course of a long story, to take a short retrospect of how things stand, especially when changes are imminent, and when, as in the present case, the process can be managed in very few words.

Angélique, then, was now betrothed to two men at once, neither of whom she could be said to love, in any sense of the word, and from neither of whom could she hope to get much worldly benefit, seeing that her first lover was still only a struggling musician, worse off than he had ever been, and that her second ran a very fair chance of being disinherited for her sake. Hugh Lester, now member for Dene-thorp, had to choose between Angélique on the one hand, and Earl's Dene on the other, with a very strong bias in favour of the shadow over the substance. Madam Clare had to decide between the loss of her son—for such he may fairly be con-

sidered—and the sacrifice of her own nature: and Mark Warden between love, duty, and honesty on one side, and the success in life which was his idol—that is to say, himself. The unlucky Félix seemed fated to be unhappy: and Marie——

But Marie is to some extent the heroine of this story, at least *pro tempore*: and yet, in the course of seven chapters, headed with her name, she has scarcely once appeared.

What in the world was she to do, with those two poor children dependent upon her, with a bad reputation in the only place that knew her, and with a husband that was no husband? She could not remain in the town after what had happened, that was certain; and where was she to go? Warden could not yet acknowledge her as his wife, for he must then resign his fellowship, and, as it were, own that he had obtained it and kept it on false pretences: and, besides, he had no other means to help himself, much less her. Nor could she live with him as his mistress, which, for the present, would have been an obvious solution of the difficulty. She would not have done so even had he proposed it to her, as he did not. And even, keeping his fellowship, he could do but very little for her. He *must* manage to get to the bar: and that he could not do, at the soonest, in less than a

long five years—it was not so quick and easy a proceeding as it is now—during which he would have to defray the expenses of his legal education and to support himself as a gentleman. Literature, and such illegitimate aids to the law student, were not in his line: and he was too practically wise to permit himself to stray from the plain, hard, straightforward style of work which had paid him so well hitherto. He knew that, if he wished to succeed in the profession that he had chosen, he must spend the period of his apprenticeship in learning it. And so it was plain that, even if he lived with strict economy, he should require in effect the whole of his income for himself. When he had paid a hundred pounds to the special pleader in whose chambers he intended to read, another hundred for his chambers, his furniture, his books, and other expenses incidental to his student life, and another hundred—he could not reckon it at less—for his clothes, his food, and his daily expenses, it was plain that it would be absurd to talk of leaving a margin in his three hundred a-year, at least for the present. He might borrow a little money on the strength of his income, it is true, but he would not be able to do so except upon hard terms, and he was much too sensible to eat all his cake at once. And so Marie

must needs do something to keep herself until better times should come in the far-off future, to feed, clothe, and educate the children, and to aid Angélique in bringing her transcendent genius before the world, which would doubtless welcome it with open arms. There, indeed, Miss Raymond would doubtless prove useful: but even Miss Raymond, kind and generous as she was, could not be expected to support a whole family. Monsieur Lefort had left nothing behind him but debts.

And so, after much talk with Warden, who certainly was honestly anxious to do all he could for her from his own point of view, it was decided that she also should pass through the trance of Hermotimus and become another drop of water in the great city, in order to attract to herself as many smaller drops in the shape of pupils as possible. Let not her husband, however, be blamed overmuch. The sacrifice of his whole career by a man for a woman's sake is one which no one in the world has a right to expect from another, even if he himself is one who is capable of making it: nor is it by any means certain that such a sacrifice—romance apart—is one that a man is even justified in making under almost any given circumstances. Whatever is best in the brain and in the arm of a man is not his own to put under the

feet of a woman—it belongs to the world : and sacrifice is quite as often the consequence of cowardice and of weakness as of strength or of courage. The whole world was open to Warden now. Great things were expected of him by others, and he felt himself capable of doing great things : and he had just gained the influence of Earl's Dene to help him to do them. All this, all the purposes of his whole heart and life he would have to forfeit by a premature acknowledgment of his marriage, or even by privately treating Marie as his wife : and he would have to commit worse than suicide by settling down into the life of an obscure country parson for the remainder of his days. It does not even follow that he would gain with his parish and his wife the consciousness of having done his duty, or that if he did, such consciousness would afford him the least satisfaction, for conscience is always much more ready to sting than to console. The leopard can change his spots sooner than one like Mark Warden can change his nature : and a life of repose, spent in the fulfilment of uncongenial duty, would, with him, simply mean a life of vain longing and lasting regret. Marriage, once more, is not the life of a man as it is of a woman : and when a man sacrifices himself and his

true life for its sake, it seldom happens that either his life or himself is worth very much.

At the same time, to prevent any misconception, it ought to be added that a sense of duty consecrates all things: and that the higher form of love, or rather of sympathy, which so few can even understand, comprehending as it does all things, is more than worth the sacrifice of them all, and does more than consecrate any act that is committed in its name. But with these remarks Mark Warden has nothing to do, and it is only made to fix a limit to the scope of those which do refer to him. His was not the nature of a martyr to duty, far less was he capable of the higher love. In this respect he resembled so many that it is impossible to blame him without blaming the world at large. He had talent and energy, but not genius, and it is only genius that can afford to sacrifice itself and yet live.

And yet it may be that in spite of all this the reader may insist in setting down this man, who was determined to make the most of his talents, as a selfish and cold-blooded creature, altogether beyond the sympathy of all brave and honest men, and his apologist as at best but a devil's advocate. So be it. His defence has been made: and if it has failed, so much the worse for him. Marie, at all events, never

thought of blaming or doubting him. Whatever might become of her, he must be my Lord Chief-Justice before he died. She, too, was a little ambitious—for him. Of herself she had never thought since she was born.

There are some things upon which it is almost, if not quite, too painful to dwell: and one is the parting of a woman from the home in which she was born, when she leaves it both for the first time and for ever. It is equal in its intensity to grief for the dead, and draws forth as many tears. And it is about the most unselfish and the purest of all sorrows. When Marie had to leave Denethorp—where, since she knew no other, her life had not on the whole been the less happy because it had been dull, and poor, and solitary—this natural grief was rendered the more poignant by the fact of her having to bid farewell to her native place with a stained reputation—for in places like Denethorp, when a good name is once breathed upon it is gone for ever—and of her father having died without learning the one secret of her life. This thought was the bitterest of all. How often will it be necessary to speak of the bitterness that lies in the words "Too late"? It is, indeed, impossible without it to speak of the daily life of any man or woman under the sun.

Far less is it necessary to speak of the visit of the Coroner to that house in Market Street to which we must now at last bid farewell, or of the judicial inquiry into the riot and the murder at Redchester, where Marie had to appear as a witness. Warden's heart was filled with pity, and wellnigh with a return of the old passion, when he saw how this girl, so dependent upon others as she was by nature, strove to bear all things, and how, for his sake and for the sake of the children, now wholly dependent upon her, she did somehow contrive to bear it all. Had it been a time to speak freely of anything but of trouble and sorrow, even he must have been impelled to declare himself her protector. But he did not do so; and at last the final wrench was made, and Marie woke from the nightmare in which she had been living since the election to find herself in London lodgings with Ernest and Fleurette, ill, indeed, in body, but supported by the feeling that she must not dare to give way. And, after all, to know that her husband was within three miles of her was something.

Of course, for present needs, she was not absolutely penniless, for Warden, with all his claims, was not unable to prevent that. Miss Raymond, too, was generosity itself. It might be thought, too, that Miss

Clare, under the circumstances, would have done something to help the orphans : but, as has been said, if she loved her friends, it was with an almost perfect hate that she hated her enemies, and it was among the latter that she included the Leforts. Nor did her mistake about Marie in the least affect her prejudices. And yet she was a good woman too : and the worst of it is that it is precisely good women who are most subject to the tyranny of prejudices of this nature.

Still, in spite of the help that she received, it was very evident that Marie would have to work hard, not only for her own daily bread, but for that of Ernest and Fleurette. Had she been alone, she might have thrown herself vaguely upon the world as governess or companion : but this, with her "encumbrances," as the advertisements say, was out of the question. She must become a mother to her brother and sister. Her views, formed under the advice of Warden, into which Angélique apparently entered—though doubtless for private reasons—were these : that the latter should place herself under her old master, Monsieur Prosper, in order to become a public singer, for which purpose it would be necessary that she should quit the service of Miss Raymond — this, perhaps, was a rash step, but then

genius must not be lost at any price—and that the two cousins should meanwhile form one household with the children, and maintain it by means of the daily pupils whom they hoped to obtain through the recommendations of Angélique's late mistress. But still all this was very vague and uncertain at the best, especially as Marie herself was so utterly ignorant of the world, while Angélique was used to luxury, and would have to devote herself rather to study than to earning money, which must for the present be the duty of the former. Nevertheless, it seemed the least unpromising plan that could be adopted.

Monsieur Prosper was quite willing to receive back his old pupil, and to undertake to do what he could for her. But he was not so pleased for the sake of Félix, who had heard nothing of her now for a long time ; and so he took care neither to mention her to him nor to let them come across each other at his lodgings. But one day Dick Barton, who was reading the 'Trumpet,' said :

"So I see they've hanged that man at Redchester for the Denethorp riot. Poor devil ! I daresay it was only his fun after all—and he only mistook his man. If they had only potted my friend Warden, now, he might have had his joke, and been knighted

on the spot into the bargain, if it was the fashion to treat men according to their deserts."

Félix was no reader of newspapers, but the word "Denethorp" struck his ears. He questioned Barton, and learned from him all that was known to the country at large about the Denethorp riot, the murder of Monsieur Lefort and the trial of some of the rioters, of whom the Government, being determined to make an example, had caused two to be hanged—in the teeth, it must be owned, of very doubtful evidence. But then political trials in those days were political with a vengeance.

Of course Félix cared nothing for that—he cared only for the matter so far as it regarded Angélique. Now that the return of Monsieur Prosper had enabled him to walk the streets in decent clothes, he, the very next morning, called at the house where Miss Raymond stayed when in town, and inquired after Miss Lefort. But the gorgeous footman who opened the door to him, and felt insulted, no doubt, at having had to leave his own occupations for such a purpose, only told him that Angélique was no longer there, and either would not, or could not, give him any further information on the subject. His appearance was anything but creditable in the eyes of his informant, or rather non-informant, who

snubbed him as a gentleman in livery so well knows how to snub a fellow who is out at elbows.

But it was inevitable that he should find her out before long. The next time that he called he asked to see Miss Raymond herself, who easily remembered him as the deputy of Monsieur Prosper at Madame Mercier's. He made his own desire to obtain pupils and engagements in London his ostensible reason for seeing her ; but he managed easily to learn all that he wanted to know about Angélique, and her family and her circumstances.

It was a terrible shrug of the shoulders that Monsieur Prosper gave when Miss Raymond made inquiries of him about Félix, and expressed herself willing to become his patroness also. But, seeing that Miss Raymond's patronage was worth having, he could not deprive his friend of the chance of obtaining it : and so, much against his will, he gave Félix the best of characters, both from an artistic and from a moral point of view.

"After all," he thought to himself, "I am not the fellow's guardian : and if he didn't go to the devil in this way, I have no doubt he would in another. But I'll never pick up a wayside genius again."

It need not be said that, for his part, Félix had

flown on the wings of love, as the phrase goes, to the house where the two girls were lodging. But neither was at home, so that his patience had to be exercised once more. By the time that he reached his own room, however, he found a note that, to him, was full of exciting matter, although it was only a request from Miss Raymond that he would attend a "*soirée musicale*," as she chose to term it, that was to be given at the house in Portman Square the very next evening. A great *prima donna* was to sing, and Mademoiselle Lefort was to make a sort of private *début*.

CHAPTER IX.

"I THOUGHT you were come to have a chat," said Monsieur Prosper, as Félix dropped into his room on his way to Portman Square. "But what is it?" he asked, suddenly. "You look like Solomon in all his glory. Mind I say *look* like it—for you are not Solomon in any other sense, my poor Félix. He was wise, and—well, never mind for the present. But what is it? Can you stay? I have a new duet for piano and violin I want to show you. It's magnificently difficult."

"Oh, I only just looked in for a minute on my way. I have an engagement."

"Really? I thought I always knew everybody's engagements."

"It is at your friend Miss Raymond's."

"The devil!"

Félix could not help colouring. "And why not?" he asked.

"Oh, it's all right, of course. They'll pay you, all safe enough."

"Are you not going?"

"I? No. I should have to hear some of my pupils, and I get enough of them in the day without wasting my evenings upon them as well. Besides, I must be at the theatre. Do you know who's to be there?"

"Oh, Catalani's to be the star, I believe, and the rest amateurs, I should fancy."

"Aha! so my new pupil is not to be there, then?"

"By the way," asked Félix, making a vain effort to change the conversation, "what do you think of your new pupil?"

"My dear Félix, when I want my throat cut I will perform the operation myself."

"Naturally. But does any one want to cut your throat, then?"

"Oh yes: half the musical profession. But you certainly would, if I said that my new pupil—by whom I suppose you mean Mademoiselle Lefort—is not Catalani and Mara combined. And so I prefer to hold my tongue."

"You don't speak very warmly about her."

"There—did I not say that you would cut my

throat? No—I will leave you to judge for yourself. I don't suppose you don't know that you will hear her in something less than an hour."

"You know how important it is that she should do well now. Miss Raymond was telling me—I suppose you have heard about her and her cousin—how she also wants to do something——"

"A cousin too, is there? Is there no end to these women?"

"Have you not heard the story?"

"I hear so many stories—I daresay I have: but I never listen to anything but *do, re, mi*. What is it?"

"Of the death of Angélique's—Mademoiselle Lefort's uncle——"

"Oh, I remember—at an election. Yes—this is certainly a free country. My faith! I should think so. I wonder I got alive through the streets myself. But the cousin?"

"It is a sad story indeed. He left a daughter, and two young children besides, who are dependent on her."

"*Eh bien!* The story is not very original."

"And how are they to live?"

"*Sacré cochon!* Am I a prophet or a millionaire, that you ask me?"

"Miss Raymond, I can guess from what she said, must have been very good to them: and there is a Monsieur Lester—I think that is the name——"

"Ah, a Monsieur! Is she pretty, this cousin? And yet you ask me how she is to live?"

"I wish you would not joke about it, Prosper."

"Well, I will not, then."

"But Miss Raymond cannot support them always. And Angélique is not brought out yet——"

"Ah! *hinc illæ lacrymæ*, as Monsieur Dick Barton would say. A strange dog, that Dick Barton! And so they are in London. *Ma foi!* It is the worst place to find anything to do."

"But you know everybody—you might know some one——"

"Oh, I know plenty of people—plenty: and they all want something to do themselves. I want something to do. But this cousin—is she in the profession, then?"

"I believe not. But Miss Raymond said that she might teach children—and you might know——"

"Oh yes, I know. She is the sort of person, you mean, who will just give me the trouble of unteaching everything when I come after: I know the sort of people who 'might teach children,' as you say. Well, well: no matter for one more or less. They

are all the same these girls, who think they can teach off-hand without having learned."

"But you might keep her in mind?"

"I might, if I knew her name—or I might not, which is more likely."

"Marie Lefort. And"—insinuatingly—"when shall I see the duet?"

"Can't you now? I want to have it played at Lady Weston's on Thursday. Would you play in it if I can get Herr Schwärmer to take the piano? Just look at it."

"Oh, I'll try my best with pleasure: and you will not quite forget to do anything if it comes in your way? But I'm afraid I must be off now."

"Well, if you must—give my love to Mademoiselle Angélique. *Pauvre garçon!*" he added to himself, as Félix closed the door behind him: "just like him—out of work himself, and then thinking only how he can get work for somebody else. And his hanging after that girl, of all girls. It's plain enough to see what *she* is. I wish people wouldn't call and put me out. Couldn't anything new be done, I wonder? People are getting tired of all the old things. If I could only get hold of a new star! I shan't make my fortune with this Mademoiselle Angélique, I'm afraid. She's pretty,—very pretty,

no doubt—much too pretty to stick to the boards. She'll be a flash in the pan, even if she isn't a *fiasco*. I wonder why in the devil's name I ever took her up! If the skies would but drop me a new star!"

And so he sank into a fit of calculation—not of castle-building, but of real calculation, with pencil and paper, till it was time for him to go to the theatre. Meanwhile Félix carried his violin-case, which had somehow been replenished since the fire —no doubt Monsieur Prosper could have told how—to the house in Portman Square, of which the windows were now brilliantly lighted. It was not the true season, but the new Parliament was sitting, and the town was sufficiently full.

Miss Raymond, owing perhaps to the fact of her having spent so many years of the most impressible part of her life abroad, was something of the conventional musical fanatic—that is to say, she knew a little music, believed herself to be a critic, and liked to play the part of an art-patroness in a small way: and as her will was law to the relations who so greatly benefited by her living with them, she was able to indulge this as much as she pleased, as well as her more real and natural tastes.

This was intended to be to some extent a concert of

distinction: and Miss Raymond was good-naturedly vain of an entertainment at which she was going to play the part of art-patroness indeed by introducing to the world as her own special *protégée* and discovery, one about whom the whole town was at once to run wild. She was not the hostess nominally, but still she was, as it were, the presiding genius of the evening: and she had no reason to complain of having gathered together an audience that was indisposed to be indulgent to her whim. The heiress of New Court was somebody, even in London. Amongst the rest Warden, who was now keeping his first term at the Middle Temple, was present, and so, of course, was Angélique, dressed in deep mourning, which, though it did not suit her style, had the effect of making her look interesting. Marie could not come to hear her cousin's first triumph—it was too soon after her sorrow.

The concert itself was very much like other concerts where the performers are for the most part members of an undistinguished clique, and the audience is half ignorant and altogether friendly—that is to say, it was artistically indifferent, but socially pleasant: and Angélique was, as a matter of course, treated as though she had been a real seraph. It would have been just the same had her voice been

that of a frog instead of a woman, and had she been incapable of singing a single note in tune. Miss Raymond was in ecstasies : the nominal *prima donna* condescended to be, or to affect to be, a little out of temper : and everybody was satisfied, and nobody could have told why.

Except Félix. He had gone to the party, in his ignorance, as so many, under far less adverse circumstances, have gone before him, expecting all manner of gratification from meeting once more her to whom he had a right to look for what he expected : he had drawn a prophetic picture in which her eyes sparkled when she saw him, in which he was constantly by her side talking of old times and of things outside and above the crowd, and in which her triumph was altogether lost in his own. But, like the hieroglyphics of prophetic almanacs, his picture prognosticated anything but what came to pass. How could she, the heroine of the evening, afford to throw more than just one look of recognition to a poor fiddler whose allotted position was behind a cruel red cord, beyond which he dared not trespass ? It was in times, be it remembered, when in some far greater, and therefore, it might be presumed, more generous houses than this, the queens of song themselves were separated visibly from the guests, as though their

presence was something dangerous. He found that he had to content himself with a distant prospect of her, like that of the sun from the earth: and the prospect was by no means delightful. He had to see others whisper in her ear, to see others sit by her side, to see others lead her to the place where she stood to sing—and, worst of all, to see others make her smile: for she by no means seemed to receive the attentions that were paid her as though her thoughts were as far away from her as he was. He was absurd enough to wonder that absence should have wrought so great a change in her: and, with the irritation of his profession and the passion for equality of his country, felt the unlucky rope in front of him grow and extend into a symbol of all manner of social wrongs, besides his own—as though its absence would have made the slightest difference! People have often followed the red flag itself on grounds more absurd than those afforded by a red cord.

“I am an artist,” he thought to himself a hundred times over, “and above all these people. Catalani herself is nothing more, after all. It is only in *bourgeois* England, then, that we should be treated so—that we should be treated like infected sheep. I will go at once.” But he did not go, of course:

for jealousy has its own fascination, and revels in its own wretchedness.

But still jealousy without a special object is to be borne, and he had yet to feel its true sting.

For now it was that a young gentleman who had arrived late, having paid his respects to the ostensible hostess, made his way to where Miss Raymond was sitting and listening to Angélique, who was singing.

The lady of New Court smiled brightly and gave him her hand, but laid her finger on her lips. He sat down beside her in silence, and, during a pause in the song, Félix could have sworn that he saw a glance of recognition pass between the singer and the new-comer, who was far too good-looking to please him. When it was over,—

“Now you may speak to me,” said Miss Raymond. “What do you think of her? Is she not charming?”

The other, recalled to earth, woke up suddenly to perform his share of the applause that followed. But he did not criticise.

“You are well again, then, as I see you here?” asked Miss Raymond. “I wish I could say you look so, though. I am so glad to see you again.”

“Not so glad as I am to be seen, I can assure you.

I got sick of being ill, or else the doctors would have had me down at Earl's Dene this very moment."

"Are you wise, then——"

"To be here? Of course I am. When one is strong enough to rebel against two doctors it is high time to use one's strength. So I travelled up yesterday, and heard from Warden that you were at home this evening." He did not, however, say what else he had heard from Warden—what, in fact, had really brought him there. It would not have been polite to Miss Raymond. "But you do not scold me for coming to you uninvited?"

"As if I were not only too glad you were able! Of course we should have asked you if we had known. So now you are an M.P.! But how you frightened us all!"

"Yes, I am actually an M.P., thanks to Warden, who ought to be in my place, by rights. Ah, he is here, I see," he said, nodding across the room. "But I must compliment the new *prima donna*."

And he went at once to the side of Angélique, who received him with a pressure of the hand just not too long to be noticed by any one, and a look from her eyes that seemed to those of Félix to be a great deal too long.

Nor was this the worst by any means. Angé-

lique had far too much tact to let it be noticed by the room generally, but her old lover could plainly see that this unknown acquaintance of hers was in reality filling the place to which he had looked forward in vain. He could see that confidential glances and communications were passing between them; and whereas he had been angry with her hitherto for the smiles that she had been scattering around her, he was angry with her now for not scattering them any longer.

It was not long before he was fairly worked into that state of fever in which impulsive men lose all mastery over themselves, and invariably do the most stupid things possible. He made up his mind that, as soon as the concert was over, he must and would speak to her—he, who was about as likely to prove her master as he was to fly over the moon, or, for that matter, rather less.

Angélique was sleeping in the house for a night or two, so that the stairs and the hall were not likely to afford him any opportunities. So he lingered long over putting up his instrument, waited till the giving of "good-nights" was in full progress, and then entered the company part of the drawing-room, full of indignation and dignity. He watched the manner in which she parted with

Lester, waited till the latter had left the room with Warden, and then presented himself.

"Angélique," he said, "I am come to wish you good-night."

Miss Raymond, with the mistress of the house, was standing close by.

"Ah," said Angélique, suddenly, and with an air of surprise, "Miss Raymond, here is Monsieur Félix—you remember—who gave us some lessons *chez Madame Mercier*."

Miss Raymond held out her hand. "Ah, Monsieur—I have to thank you for your assistance: I hope it will not be the last time. Why did you not come and speak to me before?"

But Félix, being angry, had not forgotten the red cord.

"I did not presume, Mademoiselle," he said, pointedly.

"Do I look so very dreadful, then? And what do you think of our new star—your own pupil, you know?"

"She has received more valuable applause to-night than mine could be, Mademoiselle." Then he added, turning to Angélique, "Could I speak to you a moment, before I go?"

"About my cousins? Oh, certainly," she an-

swered, coldly, and then led the way to a more retired part of the now nearly empty room.

"Well?" she asked.

"And so we meet again at last, Angélique! I thought you were going away for ever." He wished to speak tenderly, but did not quite succeed, for the attempt was too self-conscious.

"Yes—as you say, we meet again."

"And when can I see you? For I have certainly not seen you to-night."

"Have you not? I was very visible."

"Yes—in the sense that every one has seen you."

"You speak as if you had something to complain of. What more of me could you have seen?"

"To complain of! I should think so. To have been obliged to sit in a corner, and to see you surrounded by all the blockheads in the room——"

Now it may be barely possible to prove, after a fashion, that Mark Warden, in so far as he, unconsciously putting in practice the theories of Monsieur Prosper, did not allow his career in life to be spoiled by a woman, had some justification for his conduct in its practical wisdom. But it is manifestly impossible to justify this last speech of Félix. At all events, Marie had seen nothing wrong in the

one, while Angélique could not—or perhaps it would be more accurate to say, would not—pardon the other: and she must be taken to be the best judge. She drew herself up, and said,—

“I am sorry you have so poor an opinion of Miss Raymond’s friends, Monsieur Félix.”

“*Monsieur Félix*——?”

“I beg your pardon—Monsieur Créville. Thanks for correcting me. And what could you expect? That I should come and sit by you the whole evening?”

“No: but I did expect—that you would at least have known of my being in the room.”

“Oh, I knew it well enough: but I do not choose that you should make me appear conspicuous.”

“Angélique, you must have changed indeed.”

“I do not know in what way; but if I have, I never heard that a woman might not change if she pleases.”

“‘*Bien fol qui s’y fie!*’ Do you mean this for a quarrel, Angélique?”

“Why will you be so unreasonable? No—not unless you force it upon me. And pray do not speak quite so loud.”

"*Mon Dieu !* I force a quarrel upon you !"

"So it seems. And now I think you had better say good-night. The room is empty. Good-night, Monsieur Créville," she added in a louder tone, so that Miss Raymond might hear.

He was not in a condition to speak: so he bowed to Miss Raymond and left the room.

Angélique did not look after him, but watched the exit of her lover in the pier-glass, to which she had turned to see that her expression was sufficiently composed. "What folly!" she said to herself: "would he have me wait ten years for the pleasure of living in a garret at the end? What selfish creatures men are! If he would only but be reasonable!" Then she heaved the smallest of sighs, and went to bed as soon as Miss Raymond would allow her, where her triumph of the evening did not prevent her very soon falling asleep. She had done a very good evening's work in every way, and had fairly earned her repose.

For her, too, is any apology needed? Surely not. Where is the father or mother who would prefer that his or her daughter should keep troth with a penniless fiddler, when she was wooed by Mr Lester of Earl's Dene? Nor—unless we are very much

mistaken—are there many sons or daughters who would, in this respect, practically differ from their fathers and mothers. It is by majorities that the world, it seems, is henceforth to be governed : and in the hands of the majority her case may be left very safely indeed.

CHAPTER X.

MARIE, who was by no means too much troubled with visitors, was very much surprised one morning by being told that a rather oldish foreign gentleman wanted to speak to her. She was not in the most convenient order to receive any one, for she was giving the children their dinner in the one little room that served them for parlour, drawing-room, dining-room, study, and nursery, and that had therefore the air of being all at once: not to speak of its looking a little like a dressmaker's work-room besides. But the aspect of the stranger reassured her. He did not look like one who took notice of such things.

"Mademoiselle Marie Lefort?" he asked, rather bluntly.

She bowed nervously, for she was not used to speaking to strangers. The children neglected their plates and sat staring.

"You know my name, perhaps, Mademoiselle? Monsieur Prosper."

Her face brightened. "With whom my cousin Angélique is studying?"

"The same." He looked at her sharply in a way that she did not like, and that made her colour. "And I hear," continued her visitor, smiling at her confusion, "that you want to do something."

"I do indeed."

"Ah! and these little ones are the brother and sister of whom I have heard. And what's your name, my man?"

"Ernest—and this is Fleurette."

"Do you like chocolate, you and Fleurette?" and he produced a snuff-box half full of *bon-bons*. "Catch—that's right. And what can you do, Mademoiselle? Ah, you paint a little, I see. Not much in my way, that. Do you play at all—sing?"

"Very little indeed, Monsieur."

"Ah, you are not wise, Mademoiselle. You should have said 'Yes, a great deal.' You must learn to play on your own trumpet a little. And if you really play only a very little, I am afraid you will teach only a very little too."

"It is my cousin who sings."

“‘Who will sing, perhaps,’ you should have said. Well, well; I daresay you will do no worse than half your profession.”

Marie was looking very mortified and small.

“Would you mind letting me hear your voice, Mademoiselle?”

He saw her look of terror and smiled, but sat down at once before the open piano—a parting present from Miss Raymond to Angélique. “Now, Mademoiselle;” and he struck a chord.

She had never opened her lips in song before anybody before, and having to do so before this distinguished musician fairly frightened her out of her wits. A sound, however, did come out: and, though it trembled, it was in tune.

“Now this, Mademoiselle”—and so he proceeded for a minute or two. Then he shook his head, and shrugged his shoulders contemptuously.

“Now play me something,” he said.

She was trembling all over with nervousness: but she dared not disobey.

“Play anything you know best,” he said.

She sat down, and struck a very feeble chord. He stopped her.

“Who has taught you?” he asked.

“I have never had any regular lessons. Some-

times I had a few at a school in the town where I lived——”

“Hm ! well ?”

“And Angélique plays so splendidly——”

“Never mind Angélique. Well, let me see if you can do anything at all. Never mind me,” he said ;
“I’m not sure that I shall even listen to you.”

He turned away, walked to the window, and began to amuse himself by humming a tune and looking into the street. She began to play, first absurdly and weakly : but she gradually gained confidence to such an extent that she forgot that she was not alone. Indeed music to her mind suggested the idea of solitude. When the piece was over, however, her misery returned a hundred-fold. He was standing over her.

“You did not tell me the truth, Mademoiselle. Your fingering is ridiculous, and you make the most wonderful blunders besides. It is plain that your country teacher was an ass. But fortunately your other teacher was anything but an ass.”

“Angélique ?”

“Bah ! what has Angélique to do with it ?”

“But I have had no other, I assure you.”

“Oh yes, you have : one who takes very few pupils—very few indeed. Tell me—how did you use to spend your days ?”

"Oh, I used to get up early, and if it was fine, and I had time, I used to go out and walk or sketch a little. Then I used to make the breakfast, and when my poor father went out to his lessons, I used to teach the children, and mend the clothes, and go out to buy what was wanted from the town. Then we had dinner: and then I did whatever I had not had time to do in the morning, or else I amused myself."

"Ah! and how did you amuse yourself?"

"Generally with the harpsichord. I was always alone in the afternoons, so it did not matter what noise I made. And then when my father came in I sat with him and finished mending the clothes till it was time to go to bed."

"My God, what a life!" said the energetic Monseigneur Prosper, who would have gone mad had he to pass an hour without the excitement in which he lived.

"I was very happy, Monsieur."

"But did you never feel any discontent? Did you never wish to spread your wings and fly?" This was a wonderfully poetic flight for him, and he emphasised it by imitating the process with his arms.

"Never, Monsieur. I was quite content then. And as for my wings——" she smiled.

"Then you played to yourself almost daily?"

"Whenever I could. It was, indeed, my great pleasure. I do not know why, I am sure, for I play very badly, I know, and I never was taught more than what I told you: but somehow, whenever I found myself alone, and with nothing better to do, I used to sit down and play without thinking about it. Very often I did not know what I was playing, or even whether I was playing at all."

"And what did you play?"

"Oh, anything that came in my way. Ah, Monsieur, you cannot think what I sometimes found in that old harpsichord of ours. I think I used to find in it everything in the world. I am afraid you must think me very foolish: but when other girls were reading novels, and talking the nonsense that we girls do talk among each other, you know, they never seemed to get so much as I did, in my own way. I used to play the same thing over and over again, and always seemed to get something new and fresh out of it. And sometimes I used to seem to understand everything, and sometimes to feel everything without understanding it, and sometimes to lose myself altogether, and sometimes——"

She stopped suddenly, and blushed at the nonsense she felt she was talking. She had never made so

long a speech about herself in her life. But Monsieur Prosper, for a wonder, neither smiled, nor shrugged his shoulders, nor uttered a sarcasm. He only took a pinch of snuff, and said,—

“Could you play anything at sight, Mademoiselle?”

She wished the floor to open and swallow her.

“Ernest,” said Monsieur Prosper, “just run downstairs and bring up a roll of music and my violin-case.”

What new torture was she to undergo?

“This is a duet, Mademoiselle, that I have just been composing for violin and piano. Would you see what you can make of your part?”

The notes seemed to swim before her eyes; but she attacked them mechanically.

“Ah, slower than that, Mademoiselle . . . one, two, three, four, one . . . oh, *forte*, Mademoiselle, for the sake of heaven! . . . that's it . . . one, two . . . faster . . . lighter . . . the time there—mark the time, *sacré nom de Dieu!* . . . so . . . oh, *horrible!* with grace, Mademoiselle, with grace! . . . oh, *miséricorde*, don't you know what *legato* means? . . . Not the pedals there, I implore you—are you mad? . . . *Sacré nom de Dieu!* . . . Now then . . . keep on so

. . . oh, faster, faster . . . *prestissimo* . . . *mille diables* . . . *sacré nom* . . . *tonnerre d'enfer* . . . *cent cochons* . . . *sacr . r . r . r . ré ! . . .*"

And so, for a whole half-hour, which seemed to her to be three hundred years at least, her ears were filled, until, what with the music itself, and the shouting and stamping and swearing in which her tyrant indulged when the *impresario* side of his nature was lost in that of the composer, and what with her own nervousness, she almost lost her senses.

But Monsieur Prosper showed her no mercy. No sooner had she struck the last loud chord than he, having worked himself into that state so well known to and feared by the friends of all poets and composers, in which a man cannot restrain his appetite for his own works, when he has once tasted them, began to tune his violin.

It need not be said that she had to go through it all again with him, or that this time the scolding she received was something terrific.

"What do you think of that, Mademoiselle?" he said at last, as he returned the violin to its case.

She murmured something.

"Ah, I thought you would like it. That is quite *à la Moretti*, and yet not without originality. But

don't flatter yourself that you have played it—that is quite another thing. But I must be off,” he added, looking at his watch, that was suspended to a gold chain as large as a cable, “I have to take it to Herr Schwärmer: I wonder what he will make of it. *Bon jour, Mademoiselle—au revoir, mes enfans:*” and so he hurried off, leaving his victim prostrate with shame and despair.

“Miss Raymond has sent me the wrong cousin, it seems,” Monsieur Prosper said to himself as he left the house.

Poor Marie! Her head ached as though it would split: her brain was in a whirl: and it is no exaggeration to say, though the cause may seem slight enough to those who are not troubled with the nervousness of diffidence, that death would have been a relief to her. She had not strength enough left to close the hateful piano, which stood there an openly accusing witness of her shame. Had she but had the moral courage to refuse to disgrace herself! But it was too late now for regret: she could but cry with vexation.

But worse was yet to come. An hour or two afterwards, when she had become a little more composed, a note was brought to the door, directed in a strange hand to Mademoiselle Marie Lefort.

"5 — STREET, GOLDEN SQUARE.

"DEAR MADemoisELLE,—A despairing fellow-creature implores you to grant him a favour. I am engaged to conduct a concert at Lady Weston's in Park Lane, and I am going to introduce at it for the first time my duet. M. Créville will take the violin, Herr Schwärmer the piano. *Takes*, did I say?—*was* to take! for the scoundrel has sprained his thumb—would it had been his neck!

"I therefore fly to you, Mademoiselle, in whose eyes I read a compassionate soul. Play it for me—and for eternity oblige

"LOUIS PROSPER.

"The concert is not till the 10th, so you will have plenty of time for study. M. Créville shall bring it you to-morrow. And, for the love of heaven, mind about the pedals!

"I will take care you shall be satisfied about terms. *Au revoir, et bon début!*"

What! she asked to play Monsieur Prosper's own work in public at Monsieur Prosper's own request, and in the place of a celebrated professor! Surely there must be some mistake. But no—the note was only too clear, and only too plainly directed to her, and to no other. What in the world should she do?

Her first thought was to refuse at once. But then how could she dare offend this terrible Monsieur Prosper? At last, after much unhappy meditation, she made up her mind to wait till the morning. Perhaps by then her persecutor might have thought better of his extraordinary request. Would it might prove so! Meanwhile—for she was weary of this new exercise of thinking about herself—there was nothing to do but sit down and finish darning Fleur-ette's stockings. When this was finished, she went and looked at the children and then went to bed, where the music of the duet came back to her in the most terrible form of all. Queen Mab was not kind to her that night.

CHAPTER XI.

AND so Marie entered upon a week of wretchedness : for Monsieur Prosper, now that he had once obtained a hold upon her, showed his promised gratitude in a most ungrateful fashion. He not only made her a slave to the duet, but treated her as his pupil without the least reference to what might be her own views and wishes, or even consulting her on the matter. Of course she applied to her husband for advice, but he, to whom Art was only a word which conveyed nothing more than the idea of a womanish amusement with which he had no sympathy, was unable to understand her embarrassment, especially when he learned that she was to be paid for her trouble.

Besides, his own affairs were absorbing his attention more and more. He was bringing the same industry and perseverance to bear upon his new study of the common law of England by which he had already made Greek and mathematics pay so well.

The only difference in his style of study was that he found more pleasure in his work now than at Cambridge, and liked it better for its own sake. Blackstone was far more congenial to his practical nature than either Newton or Plato.

And so, on the very evening on which his wife was undergoing the nervous tortures of her *début*, he sat in his chambers in the Middle Temple, of which Inn he had become a member, thinking, not about her, but about himself. He was taking stock of his position, for he was practical even when the Middle Temple port had obliged him to put off his evening spell of work for an hour or two, and thought with a purpose when another would have dreamed: and on comparing what he was now with what he was even so short a time since as when he had been Hugh Lester's companion on the Redchester coach, he was by no means dissatisfied with the result. But still there was one hard fact of which it was impossible to get rid, which went far to spoil all his self-gratulation. He was by no means given to useless regret or to crying after spilt milk, and certainly not given to calling himself a fool: but now, as he balanced his account of profit and loss, he could not help almost thinking himself one.

"It is a hard case that a man should be punished

for the mistakes that he commits in his boyhood. I shall now have to go through life with a burden from which I shall never be free, when freedom from every kind of burden is absolutely necessary. Luckily she is not a woman who will interfere with me more than she can help, or perversely stand upon her rights. But that will not prevent my having all the disadvantages of having a wife combined with those of keeping a mistress, without having any of the advantages of either. I believe that if I were free and played my cards decently well, I might try for the New Court Stakes, and not be last in the betting. As it is, I suppose the prize will fall, as usual, to that ass Lester, who seems to have nothing to do but open his mouth, and the good things fall into it of themselves. I don't suppose that he was born richer than I, and clearly not with more brains. And yet, without any trouble or merit on his part, first he becomes heir to one of the finest estates in the country: then, again without trouble or merit of his own, without even caring about it, he drops into a seat in Parliament: and then, without having to look for her, there is an embodiment of all the virtues ready made to his hand. And I, at his age, have had to fight with fortune to wrest from her some three hundred a-year. I have borne the whole heat of a con-

tested election for the sake of another, and I am chained for life—well, to another embodiment of all the virtues. Perhaps it would be better if she were not quite so immaculate. Yes, it is certainly a very hard case! If I were only free, I do not see why the master of New Court should not be as successful against Earl's Dene as for it: and then—Come in!"

This exclamation was caused, not by a tap at the door, but by a sound as though the door was being attacked by a battering-ram. He turned round as he spoke, and, to his horror, beheld the form of his old acquaintance, Dick Barton.

"Ah," said the latter, "I guessed it was your name I saw on the staircase—'Mr M. Warden,' as bright as white paint could make it. And what are you up to now? Laying siege to the Woolsack? Well, if tricks will win the game, you'll do, I should say. One ought to keep sober in your company, it seems, eh?"

The sudden appearance of a big and powerful man upon whom one is conscious of having played a trick, is not altogether the most pleasant thing that can happen. Warden, therefore, gave a little laugh, and held out his hand.

"Ah, you mean our wager?" he said. "But I

think it was you that got the best of that, wasn't it?"

"I see," the other answered, rather contemptuously, "you consider a contested election to be like charity. Well, perhaps it is—after a fashion. '*Sacro nec cedat honori*.' But it always struck me that our friend Prescott—who, by the way, was rather taking me up, and now, of course, has let me drop again like a hot potato—managed to wing the wrong bird. Well, well: let bygones be bygones. But how's this? Do you think dry? For my part, I can't suppose that 'think' and 'drink' were made to rhyme for nothing, any more than '*bibere*' and '*scribere*,' or '*pirein*' and '*krincin*.' Any way, I'm certain that at this moment Dick Barton rhymes with anything to drink short of pump-water."

"I'm very sorry. My cellar's empty, I'm afraid."

"Oh, if that's all, a shilling or two will set that square. I'll fetch it. There's a place round the corner where there's capital brandy. Perhaps you know it? No? Then you shall in five minutes. I'm afraid I must produce the coin, though."

"I'm very sorry, Barton—but I'm afraid I have an engagement in half an hour."

"Oh, never mind. I'll go when she comes. So just lend me half-a-crown—or say ten shil-

lings, if you can spare them, and I'll be back in no time."

"Oh, with pleasure," Warden answered, on the principle that the surest way to rid one's self of an acquaintance is to lend him that precise sum. Nor did the loan seem to have been wasted, for five minutes after five minutes passed, and Barton did not return. Warden sat down to read, and it was quite late when a knock at the door made his heart sink within him. It proved, however, not to be Dick Barton this time, but only his friend Hugh Lester.

"Why, Lester, this is a pleasant surprise! What brings you into this part of the world?"

"I'm just come from Lady Weston's, old fellow, and thought I would just smoke a cigar with you on my way, as I felt bored."

"Well, I am delighted to see you, especially as I was getting rather bored myself with my own company. Will you take anything?"

"Have you such a thing as a soda-and-brandy?"

"I daresay I have. There—now you can help yourself." Warden could see that his visitor had something on his mind of which he had come to deliver himself, and besides, the Temple is not exactly on the way from Park Lane to Bruton Street. "What was going on this evening?" he asked.

"Oh, a sort of a concert—a great bore. By the way, Miss Lefort was playing—Marie, you know."

"And how did she get on?" asked Warden, with some little interest.

"Oh, she seemed all right. But I know nothing about that sort of thing."

"And did the fair Angélique perform?"

"No: but she was there with Miss Raymond."

"And did not Miss Raymond keep you from being bored?"

"Did I say I was bored? The fact is, Warden, I want your advice about something."

"Really? Well, I will give you the best I can."

"I know you will, old fellow."

"And what is it this time? Love or war?"

"Why, you see," Hugh was beginning, when a peal of thunder was heard at the door.

"The devil!" exclaimed Warden.

"What is it?"

"I'm afraid I must open. If I don't, he's just the man to break in. I suppose he saw the light in the window."

"But who is it?"

"Do you remember Barton of Tudor?"

"Of course I do, though I never met him."

"So much the better for you. I am extremely sorry, but I'm afraid I must let him in."

"I am sorry too, for I really wanted to see you."

And so Barton came in, bearing a bottle in triumph under his arm.

"Beg your pardon, Warden, for being so long. Hang it, I can't be drunk, and yet I see two brandy-bottles. Or have you been sending out and taking a mean advantage? All right—the more the merrier. We'll make a night of it."

"Really, Barton——"

"Oh, you be shot! Mayn't a man make himself at home in another man's rooms? Why, there are two Wardens!"

"Indeed there are not. This is Mr Lester, the member for Denethorp: and we have business to talk over. I told you I had an engagement."

"But where the devil am I to go, then?"

"Why not go home?"

"Warden, you're a milksop. Come—be hospitable for once. The night is young: and, what's more, I'll be shot if I go home!—there."

"You see?" said Warden to Hugh in despair. "I know this fellow, and that it is impossible to get rid of him."

And there was in fact nothing to be done but for

Hugh to make an appointment to see Warden at his chambers in the morning, to plead that he was bad company—as, in fact, he felt—and to go home, leaving Warden to the mercy of his old man of the sea.

He returned to the Temple at about ten o'clock the next morning.

"Why, how's this?" he said, on seeing the aspect of Warden's room: "you have been having a debauch with a vengeance."

"It is simply the most terrible animal I ever heard of," said Warden, smiling, to cover his ill-humour: "here he is still, you see;" and he pointed to a sofa on which lay Barton asleep—not like a man who is working off the effects of much brandy, but like a child that has taken nothing stronger than milk-and-water in its life.

"What in the world are you going to do with him?"

"God knows! At Cambridge, I believe, he used to sleep four-and-twenty hours at a stretch when he slept at all, without waking. And where could one send him? He told me last night that he has given up living under a roof altogether."

"Oh, let the poor wretch sleep it out. Shall we go out and talk somewhere else?"

"And leave no one here but this infernal fellow?"

He would smash everything to pieces to look for liquor, or bring more in and get drunk again."

"That is true. Well, he's sound asleep, and one will know when he wakes, I suppose?"

"Trust him for letting us know that."

"Well, then—but I'm afraid I'm boring you."

"My dear fellow!"

"It's all about myself, you know—or rather it isn't. Would you mind my lighting a cigar?"

"A hundred, if you like."

"Thank you. Well, then, you see—I daresay you'll think me an infernal ass—but as you know the people, and all that, you'll see—will you take a cigar yourself?"

"No, thank you."

"Well, then, the fact is—I am engaged to be married."

"Indeed! Then let me be the first to congratulate yourself and the lady. Am I wrong in guessing that it is to Miss Raymond?"

"No, it's not to Miss Raymond, and that's just the difficulty. You see my aunt seems to have set her heart on my marrying Miss Raymond."

Somehow Warden felt relieved, though of course it could be nothing to him.

"Am I to know who the lady is?" he asked.

"Mademoiselle Lefort."

Warden naturally thought of the election gossip about Lester and Marie. There must have been something in it, then, after all.

"The devil it is!" he exclaimed, but with a meaning very different from what Hugh supposed.

"And why not?" asked the latter, a little sharply.

"It is impossible you can be engaged to her."

"What do you mean? It is possible, because I am."

"Does Miss Lefort know?"

"How could I be engaged without?"

"But it is impossible. There must be some mistake."

"What in the world can you mean? How could I be mistaken about such a thing?"

"I mean that it cannot be."

"But why?"

"Because I happen to know: but I cannot tell you why—I can only tell you that you must most certainly be mistaken, though I grant it is strange that you should be. I know the Leforts well, and I assure you, as your friend and theirs, that it is quite impossible."

Of course it was quite possible, he thought, that Hugh might have declared his passion, and that

Marie, in her innocence and stupidity and shyness, and with the weight of her secret embarrassing her, might not have repulsed him in a manner that he had understood. How he wished that she had been free not to have repulsed him at all! He would have yielded her to Hugh, or to any one else, with the best will in the world. Hugh, knowing what he knew, could only stare in blank amazement. If he thought anything, it was that Warden, as his friend, considered it a friendly thing to save him from a *mésalliance*.

"Really, Warden, I must know what you mean. Indeed I have a right to an explanation—if you have any to give."

As he spoke another thought suggested itself to him. Warden was an older acquaintance of the family than he, and had known Angélique from childhood. Was it not possible that he might be a rival?

Warden saw the thought show itself in his friend's face: and he also saw that he was himself in a difficult position. Of course he supposed that he knew his wife well enough to assume that Hugh must necessarily be mistaken in thinking what he did appear to think: but still, unfortunately, it would never do to allow him to remain in his error. Marie, in

self-defence, might have her secret wrung from her : and so he was ready enough to tell himself that it was his duty to spare her from persecution, and Hugh from running his head against so hard a wall.

"My dear fellow," he said, "you cannot marry Miss Lefort. I will tell you why, if you will promise to respect her secret : and you will then see that you must be mistaken in thinking that she could have promised to be your wife."

Hugh turned pale.

"It must not be known on any account. There are good reasons why, which I am not bound to tell you, seeing that they affect other persons : nor will you therefore ask me. But I am bound to save you from an unprofitable pursuit : and I will therefore rely upon your honour not to let what I do say go farther than ourselves. Do you promise ?"

Heaven knows what Hugh expected to hear : but he nerved himself as well as he could to hear his doom, whatever it might be. Of course he was equally prepared not to believe any story that might reflect upon Angélique.

"If it is no scandal—if it is nothing that my speaking may remove," he answered.

"Oh, it is no scandal," Warden answered, "but the contrary. It is that she is the wife of another man."

Hugh started forward. "That she is married? No—that I cannot believe."

"But when I tell you that I know it—that it can be proved?"

"Prove it, then."

"Did I not say that I could tell you nothing that affects others? It is enough for you that I am bound in honour to say no more."

The word "honour" always acted upon Hugh Lester like a spell. "But I am not bound to make no inquiries," he answered. "I am not going to give her up for a word, especially as if what you say is true—if you are not mistaken, I mean—I should have to believe that it is she who has deceived me. I will ask you nothing more: but I will go straight to her."

"What! and force her secret from her?"

"Yes. It seems to me that I have some right in it also."

Somehow Warden had not calculated upon this. Perhaps he had relied too much upon the power of managing Hugh which he supposed himself to have acquired.

"Indeed you must do no such thing."

"What?"

Hugh spoke more in astonishment than in anger

at being thus addressed by one to whom he was quite as much a patron as a friend.

"I mean that if you do——"

Hugh somehow felt that the advantage was with himself.

"Well—and if I do?"

"I think it very likely that she would deny it."

"And that I should have to decide between her solemn word and your word, which you refuse to prove? So that is your reason for saying that I must not? Very well then, I will not: for I should not dream of doubting her."

It did not suit Warden to quarrel with Hugh, otherwise the last speech gave him ample opportunity, and, had he been of warmer blood, would have had its effect, though, on Hugh's part, unintentionally. The latter had merely meant to say that he would take Angélique's word against that of all the world.

"Then," said Warden, not knowing exactly what to say, and speaking slowly to give himself time to consider, "if you do speak to Marie—to Miss——"

"To Marie?"

"To Miss Lefort, then. If ——"

"By why did you say Marie?"

"Are we not speaking of her?"

"My dear fellow!" Hugh exclaimed, his face brightening, "do you mean to say you thought I meant Marie?"

Warden blushed scarlet, for about the first time in his life. "I did think so certainly."

"Good God! how you frightened me! What! is Marie married?"

"You will surely respect her secret now?"

"Oh, I will be like the tomb. But what on earth made you think I meant Marie?"

"I suppose I was stupid. So you are engaged to Angélique?" he added, in a meditative tone.

"That is what I wanted to tell you," Hugh was beginning: but Warden scarcely heard him. His mind was flying off to other things.

"I see," he said at last. "And Miss Clare objects, I suppose—or would object if she knew."

"She objects very strongly indeed."

"And how can I advise you?"

"You see I don't want Angélique—Miss Lefort—to marry a beggar. And my aunt is so set against it, that——"

"Then my advice would be to do nothing in a hurry. Has Miss Clare—if I may ask—talked to you about this—told you anything about what she means to do?"

"She is so set on my marrying Alice Raymond—who I don't suppose would have me if I asked her—that if I marry as I must and ought, Miss Raymond will take my place altogether: and you know my aunt, that she does not speak without meaning it. I don't care about that, you know, only for Angélique: and because I like my aunt too much, and am too grateful to her to want to quarrel with her if I can help it. It's very odd that she can't see the thing in the same way as I do."

"Well, certainly, one would think that marriage is a matter in which a man should judge for himself. And if I know Miss Clare, she likes you too well for things not to come all right."

"Ah, you don't know her as I do."

"Of course not. But look here, Lester. You know that Miss Clare is for some reason or other inclined to put some confidence in me?"

"Naturally, after what you have done for us."

"Well then, if I, a disinterested third person, were to put the thing calmly before her—I suppose you have quite made up your own mind on the matter?"

"Quite."

"And I congratulate you on your choice. Miss Lefort's only fault is want of fortune: and what is that

to you ? Then if, as I say, I spoke quietly to Miss Clare——”

“Would you really ?”

“Of course I would ; though of course I cannot tell what the result would be. By the way, does Miss Lefort herself know of Miss Clare's objection ?”

“Why, no. There was no need, you see——”

“So much the better. There can be no reason why she should feel that there is any personal objection to her on the part of Miss Clare, if it can be avoided.”

“You are the best fellow that ever lived, Warden.”

“Oh, nonsense. I haven't done anything, and most likely never shall.”

“And are you likely to be going down to Dene-thorp soon ?” asked Hugh, with all the selfish impatience of a man in love.

“I daresay I may be, at Christmas.”

“Not before ?”

“How can I ?”

“Well, I suppose not. Then you think I'd better not tell Angélique ?”

“I should say certainly not. You really mean what you say, of course ?”

“Certainly. I intend to make her my wife, whatever may happen.”

"Well, 'the course of true love,' you know. You may feel quite safe that in the end Miss Clare will be only too glad to change her mind."

"Well, you are a good fellow—and I can't thank you enough. By the way, why don't you go in for Alice Raymond yourself—a girl with no nonsense about her, and a good fortune besides?"

Warden smiled. "What! a country doctor's son go in for the lady of New Court?"

"Oh, why not?" It is wonderful how cheap men hold what they do not want themselves.

"I hope you are not breaking her heart."

"If I am, you had better heal it."

"Oh, this is my wife," replied Warden, laying his hand upon a volume of 'Coke upon Littleton.' "And now, just consider it all right—and don't make yourself unhappy by thinking about difficulties."

"You really think it will come all smooth?"

"Of course I do—and of course it will. Holloa! What's that? By Jove! I had quite forgotten that guest of mine."

What he had heard was the creaking of the sofa caused by the return to waking life of Dick Barton, who, after a yawn or two, succeeded in twisting himself into a position that was very tolerably upright.

"The devil!" he exclaimed, after another prodig-

ious stretch. "I say, have you got anything to drink? I'm confoundedly thirsty."

"Soda-water?"

"Soda be blowed! *Kunos crinè*—a hair of the dog, man."

"I'm afraid you devoured the dog between you, hair and all, before you fell asleep," said Lester, who had recovered something of his usual good-humour.

"And who the devil are you? Damn you, Warden, you can't have drunk the whole of the three bottles to your own cheek."

"Will you have some tea?"

"Faugh!"

"Well then, you won't have anything at all," said Warden, who had begun to guess how his enemy ought to be treated.

"I call that horrid unfriendly of you. I shall go at once—and damn me if ever I come here again. Warden, you're a —, and I always thought so, and now I know it. By the way," he added, feeling in his pockets, "I'm cleaned out. Could either of you fellows lend me half-a-crown?"

"And is this the Dick Barton that was to do such wonderful things?" asked Lester, as the door closed.

"How does he live?"

Warden shrugged his shoulders contemptuously.

"So much for genius!" said the practical man.

"Poor devil!" said Lester, "one must try and give him a chance—what's the good of being in the House else?" And so, after a renewal of his thanks, he too left the room, leaving Warden to 'Coke upon Littleton.'

He did work at 'Coke upon Littleton;' but he also worked at something else besides.

CHAPTER XII.

WARDEN had no particular inclination to spend his Christmas at home. He was not a person of domestic tendencies, his father bored him, and he was not fond of the society of his father's friends. Not even did he care to cultivate the acquaintance of Mr Brown, even though he was an attorney's managing clerk. But still, much to his sister's delight, he announced at the beginning of December that he was about to pay them a short visit. It was nothing more than a very ordinary sort of coincidence that Miss Raymond was going to spend her Christmas at Earl's Dene. Hugh ought to have spent his there also: but he was a man of many engagements, and felt rather afraid of his visit besides, for he also felt instinctively that the breach between himself and his aunt had practically begun, and that he should, as it were, be making Earl's Dene his home under false pretences. Moreover, he knew that his friend was going down,

and fancied that it would be better for his own cause if he himself kept out of the way and left the field clear for the abler strategist.

And so Warden went down accordingly, listened to his father's complaints of the rival doctors, and of the pane of glass through which the wind still blew, received the admiring homage of his sister, heard Mr Brown retail the small gossip of the place, and dined upon lukewarm mutton. But he did not let his domestic enjoyments detain him from making an early call at Earl's Dene.

He found Miss Clare not improved in health by any means: but she gave him a most cordial welcome, not only for his own sake, but because she hoped to get news of Hugh in respect of the matter about which she was most anxious.

"You still see something of Hugh?" she asked, after a word or two of greeting.

"Oh, very often. I think I may consider that we are friends."

"I hope so. I was in hopes that he would have spent Christmas down here."

"You see he has so many engagements."

"Still I should have thought he might have been able to spare a day or two. But this is but a dull house for a young man to come to, I know."

Warden looked his protest.

"By the way, I have one visitor, though—your old acquaintance, Miss Raymond of New Court."

"Indeed?"

"She, too, has seen something of you in town, she tells me. By the way, as we are talking about Dene-thorp people, what has become of those Leforts since the father met with that unfortunate accident?"

"Oh, they are in London, doing what they can."

"Miss Raymond tells me that the niece means to go on the stage."

"Yes: I believe that is so."

Of course she was vainly trying to get an opening for finding out whether and to what extent Warden was in her nephew's confidence. At last, true to her despotic instincts, that never allowed her to procrastinate or beat about the bush, she said,—

"I, too, may consider you one of Hugh's friends?"

"One of his and yours, Miss Clare."

"I am not going to ask you to commit a breach of confidence: besides, I know that you would not do so if I did. But has he ever mentioned these young women to you?"

"In what way?"

"You know there were some absurd stories about him here?"

"Oh, at the election. No one minds election reports."

"You see so much depends upon the marriage of one in Hugh's position."

"No doubt."

"It would never do even to run the risk of Earl's Dene falling into the hands of an actress — of a Papist."

"Of course not."

"You see, living as I do, there are so few people I can trust—and I suppose that as one gets older one gets more anxious and nervous—at least I am anxious that Hugh, who is as if he were my son, should do rightly in everything. Now you, who are his friend and have some influence, I know——"

"I fear, Miss Clare, you overrate my power."

"Oh no. Men listen often to their friends when they are deaf to their mothers—you can talk to him as men talk. You understand me?"

"You may be sure that any influence I may have over Mr Lester shall be used as you would approve and for his real good."

"You promise?"

"Faithfully."

"Thank you, Mr Warden. You have taken a weight off my mind. You will then—you of all

people will know how—save him from the danger of—you know what I mean?”

“I promise to do my best.”

“You might tell him, in case of necessity, what I have told him also—that if he continues to be bent upon this impossible marriage——”

“I would rather hear no more, Miss Clare.”

“But you had better. You know that I always do what I say: and if he is obstinate, Alice Raymond shall be mistress of Earl's Dene. And you may tell Miss Lefort so also. I imagine that she, at least, will not be obstinate when she hears that.”

That she was perfectly in earnest was sufficiently proved by her forgetting her pride so far as to take one of her subjects into her private confidence in order that she might work with greater certainty. But it must, nevertheless, have been a bitter pill for her to swallow.

“Surely, Miss Clare, you cannot be speaking seriously?”

“But I am indeed. And after all it is not likely that he should really be guilty of such madness.”

“Most unlikely, I should say.”

“But still you will remember what I have said—you will watch, warn, save him if you can—and that by *any* means?”

"I will do all I can."

"I felt sure that I might rely upon you, otherwise I should not have said to you what I have. Be sure that we shall not be ungrateful."

"I hope you do not think—is it not only my duty?"

"But we have our duties, too, and gratitude is among them," she said, in royal fashion, as she held out her hand. "And now you will stay to lunch. I see Miss Raymond coming back from her ride."

Miss Clare, as queen of Denethorp, of course considered herself as only giving orders to, and promoting to high trust and confidence, one of her subjects who had proved his devotion to the reigning house when she gave Warden charge of the crown-prince, and not as in any way laying a burden upon him. She felt gratitude, as she said: but, in her eyes, he was doing no more than his duty to his liege lady in undertaking to keep her heir from forming an unsuitable alliance. What his own private views might be were nothing to her, nor did she even remember that he might possibly have any. And if he had, what could they matter even to himself when the interests of Earl's Dene were concerned? Nevertheless the interview did open out to him a new and strangely-

exciting train of thought, of which the burden was, "If it were not for Marie!"

Putting her out of the question altogether—supposing there were no such person in existence—it would of course be open to him to try his chance with Miss Raymond, as anybody else might, without any reference to the coming estrangement between Miss Clare and her nephew. It was true that his birth was not such as to facilitate his entry into a county family. But then, would he be the first poor gentleman who had, by marrying an heiress, founded a family of his own? *Ce que femme veut, Dieu le veut*: and fortune favours the bold. His father and sister might be provided for elsewhere: and for himself, he felt that he could hold his own were he to marry into the ranks of the peerage itself. After all, as the son of a professional man, as a fellow of his college, as a distinguished member of his university, as a barrister—a word that then meant far more than it has since come to mean—as, in the future, a member of Parliament, and heaven knows what besides, it would soon be forgotten that the professional man whose son he was was only Dr Warden of Denethorp, and that his mother was the daughter of a Redchester druggist. This he might have done as a matter of course: but now he felt

after his interview with Miss Clare, that, were he only free, he might do something very much more. He smiled to himself as he remembered how he felt when he traversed, in Hugh Lester's company, the stage of road between Redchester and Denethorp. If Hugh should marry Angélique, then Miss Raymond would be a prize worth the winning indeed. He knew as well as anybody that Miss Clare invariably meant what she said, and he thought he knew how to manage her, in case Miss Raymond proved favourable. If it were only not for Marie!

But as, unfortunately, it was impossible to put Marie out of the question, it was all impossible together. Still he was not one to throw away even the odd ends of string, the scraps of paper, and the stray pins that chance affords. "Waste not, want not"—everything may come in usefully some day. At all events, there was no use in being impolite to Miss Raymond: and so, to avoid Charybdis he fell into Scylla—that is to say, he made himself very polite to her indeed. Nor did the young lady herself object, for she had a tendency to hero-worship, and since the contest Warden had remained the hero of the Tory part of the country-side.

He enjoyed his lunch very much, nor did he again remember his wife's existence until he was

half-way home. And then, when he did call her to mind, he was angry, not with himself, but with Circumstance, who had treated him so unfairly and so unkindly. At last, like everybody who gets angry with Circumstance, he began to recollect certain bits and scraps of consolation with which men flatter themselves that they are not such very poor creatures after all, but, indeed, rather the contrary—such as “Man is the architect of his own fortune”: “The mould of a man’s fortune is in his own hands”: “*Vouloir c’est pouvoir*”: “The wise man makes more opportunities than he finds”: “*Aut inveniam viam aut faciam*”: and a hundred other similar specimens of proverbial nonsense.

In a mind like his, no practical idea that is once sown remains quite barren. He could not entertain the thought that he might, under other circumstances, have become master of Earl’s Dene without at the same time entertaining the wish that it were still possible: and he could not entertain the wish without being led to consider whether, after all, its fulfilment were quite as impossible as it at first sight appeared. “Is, in truth, anything impossible?” he thought: “Napoleon denied the existence of the word.”

People who quote the authority of Napoleon in

this matter, generally seem to forget that their authority lived to find himself mistaken.

"So you've been up at Madam's, have you?" asked Mark's father, as they sat over the fire after dinner. "Quite right. The old lady's been uncommon civil since the election. Game, you know, and all that. We may cut out that ass Smith yet, my boy. Miss Raymond's up there too, isn't she? Ah, a fine match that'll be for Master Hugh."

"Ah," winked Mr Brown, "we know something about that, Mr Mark: don't we?"

"Do we?"

"I expect Miss Alice was nigh losing our member. We know when. I wonder what's become of Miss Mary now, up in town?" Here he gave another wink. "And I wonder whether our member knows? For my part, though, I always thought 'twas the other one had most style."

Mark felt a strong desire to kick him. After all, Marie was his wife, much as he might wish that she were not.

"You seem to know much more about it than either I or Mr Lester," he answered, with a coldness that made Mr Brown stare.

"I wonder when the wedding will be, and if

it'll be at Denethorp!" exclaimed Lorry. "I think Miss Raymond so pretty, Mark: don't you?"

"I know some one prettier," said Mr Brown, with a leer at Lorry, for which her brother would have gladly kicked him again, especially as he saw that she only blushed.

"By the way, Brown," asked the surgeon, "that's a bad case up Gorsley way. Have you anything to do with it?"

"We, Mr Warden? We don't do criminal business. But what's the rights of it?"

"Why, hanging's about the rights of it, I reckon. Man and wife, you know—tired of her, and keeping company with another woman. She won't have him till the wife's dead. So what does he do, when his wife's asleep in bed, but just quietly go to work with his fingers and thumbs, you know, till what-d'ye-call was induced, and she went off the hooks. I made the *post mortem* with what's-his-name of Gorsley—brain congested, lungs gorged, tongue protruding half an inch, no end of *ecchymosis* just where it ought to be, you know—larynx, and *conjunctivæ*, and all that——"

"And how did he kill her?" asked Mr Brown.

"Why, aren't the appearances as clear as day

light? Throttled her, of course, and no mistake about it."

"La, how horrid!" exclaimed Lorry.

"H'm," said Mr Brown; "marry in haste, and repent at leisure. Well, what I always say is, as a man makes his bed, so he must lie."

Why should Mark Warden, the scholar and the gentleman, have felt a half-guilty sensation at the narration of this brutal and vulgar crime? But he did feel it: nor was Mr Brown's not very original remark without its sting. After the quotations from historians and philosophers in which he had been indulging, the homely platitude of the lawyer's clerk was a terrible piece of bathos: but it was not ineffective.

CHAPTER XIV.

NIGHT brings counsel. "Well, I suppose I must yield to fate," was Warden's first thought when he awoke the next morning. "But still——" he added; which meant that he had at all events made up his mind that his friend should marry Angélique Lefort. He could not see his way to the end of the game: but still that was no reason why he should not play such good cards as he held in his hand. Something might come of them, and nothing could come of his keeping his word to Miss Clare. Indeed, he had, after all, promised nothing definitely.

He did not return to London at once, but was a good deal about Earl's Dene—making love, any one would almost have said who did not know the circumstances. To a certain extent he was not altogether responsible for the length to which he went in cultivating the acquaintance of Miss Raymond:

for the duration naturally gratified the vanity from which marriage does not exempt a man, and he thought he could trust himself not to go too far. He also made himself extremely useful to Miss Clare herself, and, in spite of his dislike for Mr Brown and his fellows, strove, not unsuccessfully, to make himself popular among them also: at all events, to make them look up to him, which, with his views, was more to the purpose than making himself popular. Meanwhile it was characteristic of him that, while dreaming of shadows, he never for a moment loosened his hold upon the substance, for he never passed a day without reading law for a certain number of hours.

At last, however, the day came when it was necessary for him to return, and of course he called at Earl's Dene to say good-bye. His last words to Miss Clare consisted of a renewal of his promise to do what he could to prevent her nephew's marriage. To Miss Raymond he bade a simple "good-bye"—spoken, however, in a tone that meant much, and that made her think. Nor were her thoughts unkindly. She was not likely to fall in love consciously without being asked to do so: but she had got as far as thinking it by no means unlikely that she might be asked. Besides this, she could not help seeing, with

a woman's instinct in such matters, that Warden was strong enough to be her master: and when a woman sees that, she is half won already. It need not be said that her first unreasonable and unconscious prejudice against him had taken flight ages ago.

As soon as he found himself once more in London, it was, no doubt, his duty to pay his wife a visit: but he, thinking no doubt that that would keep, and that other things would not, first called at the chambers of the pleader with whom he was reading, and then went to Hugh's lodgings in Bruton Street.

"Warden! what an age you've been gone! and what news, old fellow? Will you have some breakfast? When did you come back? Did you see my aunt? Did you say anything to her? Did——"

"I saw Miss Clare," answered Warden, gravely, in a tone which made Hugh's countenance fall.

"Well?"

"She says—well, the long and short of it is, that if I were you I would just give the whole thing up."

"Then there goes Earl's Dene—that's all."

"Why, you don't mean to say——"

"I do, though. I'm sorry, of course, for her sake, you know: but she must make up her mind to marry a poor man instead of a rich one: and so that's over."

"But, my dear fellow, just think——"

"Angélique has more claim on me now than my aunt, after all. And my aunt herself wouldn't want me to be such a cur as to sell my love and my faith for all the land in the world."

"Your wife ought to be a proud woman, Lester."

"Rubbish! And so there's an end of it. I'll write to my aunt at once."

Warden laid his hand on his shoulder. "I have been but a bad ambassador, I fear," he said; "but——"

"And I have not thanked you for troubling yourself about my affairs. I only wish I could see my way to thanking you as I should like to."

"Not a word about thanks, pray! But, I was going to say, I should advise you not to write just now."

"But surely——"

"I know what you would say. But had you not better wait until you have seen Miss Lefort herself?"

"You speak as though you doubted her."

"Not the least. But——"

"But what, then?"

"Why, the result would be this: Miss Clare would probably not answer you. But she would leave no stone unturned to prevent this marriage. She would

take care to let Miss Lefort know that by marrying you she was ruining you for life. And if Miss Lefort is as generous as I have no doubt she is, she would refuse to marry you,—not for her own sake, but for yours. No : see her first—this very day, if you like—and get her promise : and then write to Miss Clare as soon as you please.”

“I daresay you are right. Then I will go to Angélique at once.”

Warden considered. It was more than probable that Angélique, when she learned from her lover how matters stood, would throw him over, not for his sake, but for her own. It was not from any special knowledge of the character of Angélique that the thought arose, but rather from a knowledge of what he himself would have done had he been in the same situation. Indeed, would not any man or woman of sense have done so ? So he had to a slight extent to draw upon his imagination.

“By the way,” he said, “I doubt if you can see her to-day.”

“Why not ?”

“I have been at the house, and she will not be in till evening.”

“And in the evening she will be at the theatre. It is unlucky.”

"At the theatre?"

"Yes;—don't you know? She is going to come out for the first time."

"The devil she is! I hope Miss Clare won't know that, at all events. She will object ten times more if she hears that your wife has appeared on the stage."

"Then it will be all the more for me not to let Angélique suffer for so unjust a prejudice," said Hugh, loftily. "I will see her this evening, anyhow,—at the theatre itself, for that matter. But don't go, old fellow. How the deuce is one to get through the day till then?"

"I would stay with pleasure, only I have an engagement that I must keep. Shall I look up to-night, after the play is over?"

"Do;—and if I'm not in, wait for me."

Warden at once caught the first coach that was passing.

"To Berners Street!" he said; and then settled himself down to think: an art that he had of late been cultivating rather too assiduously in some directions, and neglecting too much in others.

Fortunately he was not obliged to lose any time, for Marie was out and Angélique at home. She was reading a manuscript, and the room looked more like

a milliner's workshop than ever. She rose as he entered, and smiled graciously.

"Ah, Mr Warden," she said, "you have come just in time."

"For what?"

"To-night I make my *début*: and I shall expect you to come and hiss me."

"I will come, of course: but otherwise I do not intend to be alone in a crowd. What is the part? and where?"

"Here is the bill."

"But I don't see your name?"

"But you see that of Miss Marchmont,—we are the same. I play Donna Inez."

"By the way, I have seen a friend of ours, who will also come, and not hiss you, I should say."

"And who is that, pray?—Miss Raymond?"

"Scarcely, seeing that she is in ——shire. Shall you be angry if I tell you a secret?"

She looked at him quickly and sharply.

"I suppose you mean that you want to tell me one?"

"Exactly so."

"And that you have come on purpose to tell it?"

"That is so, also."

She looked a little anxious. "You had better tell

it then, and run the risk of my being angry. I adore secrets."

"It is this, then. I have just come from Dene-thorp."

"Is that all?"

"Not quite. When there, I did myself the honour of calling at Earl's Dene." She watched his face, and saw that he was smiling in a way that half alarmed, half reassured her—as, in fact, he intended. He went on. "I do not know whether you know that the great Madam Clare has some belief in my wisdom?"

"You are very mysterious."

"Well, it seems that you have made a conquest."

She tossed her head. "It is very possible," she answered.

"So possible that it must be so. But, I fear, not of the great lady."

"And why do you say all this to me?"

"To fulfil a promise. To tell you that she will never consent to her nephew's marriage."

"Indeed! I am very much obliged to her. And, in return for your secret, I will give you a piece of advice."

"What is that?"

"Not to meddle with what does not concern you."

"I beg your pardon. Mr Lester is my friend: and what concerns him, concerns me also."

"Then speak to him, if you think I am not fit to marry him. I think it scarcely usual among gentlemen to do as you seem to be doing. You can know nothing about the matter. Are you in his confidence as well as in Miss Clare's?"

"I am: and I have spoken to him also."

"And he sent you here?" She began to be terribly afraid that her game was lost—that Hugh had yielded, and had been ashamed to tell her so in person. Like Mark Warden, she was apt to judge of what other people would do by what she would have done in their place: and she, too, was a person of sense.

"No—not at all."

"Then why do you come?"

"To appeal to your generosity on behalf of my friend."

"Ah,—I begin to understand. You mean that Miss Clare will disinherit him?"

"I fear so. Indeed I am sure of it, if——" He paused.

"If what?"

"If he remains true to you—if he marries you—and—*if she knows it.*" He spoke the last words with

a marked and special emphasis, which she could not fail to perceive.

He saw that she understood as much of his thought as he wished her to understand. But she looked inquiringly, nevertheless.

"You know how straightforward he is," he replied to her look.

"That is true. And I, too, should be the last to advise deception. You are right. It is not for me to ruin him."

She spoke so seriously that he stared at her for a moment in astonishment. Then he smiled.

"You will refuse to marry him, then?"

She turned away her face.

"If it must be so," she said, in a low tone.

"And about this evening?" He did not think it worth while to waste words of sympathy.

"Let him come to the theatre."

"Of course you will not tell him that I have told you this? I have been acting solely for his interest: and I should not like him to quarrel with me for having acted as his friend."

"Of course not. And now I daresay you will not mind leaving me to myself. '*If she knows it!*'" she added to herself, with a smile. "Well, I think I am able to keep a secret from Madam Clare."

"Well, I have kept my promise," thought Warden to himself. "If Hugh Lester will make a fool of himself, that is not my fault."

And to a certain extent he really persuaded himself that it was not.

CHAPTER XV.

So far as the world at large was concerned, this was the history of that evening, according to the dramatic critic of the 'Trumpet':—

"Last night was produced at this house, for the first time, a new musical drama entitled 'Faith's Reward,' written by Mr —, the music being composed by M. Prosper. The plot is briefly this," &c. "The music is excellent," &c. "Miss Marchmont, the *débutante*, however, must be pronounced a failure. She is remarkably pretty, and that is always something; but unfortunately, in her case, that is all. It often happens that a first appearance calls for indulgence; but when the *débutante*, far from showing any symptom of nervousness, gives, by her carelessness of demeanour and apparent indifference to what she is about, the impression that she thinks herself too good for her audience, for her fellow-

actors, and for her part, while her whole style of singing and acting proves that she is very much mistaken, she deserves the reverse of indulgence. We are afraid, however, that an actress so careless of applause will be equally careless of censure; and if that is the case, it will be unnecessary for us to give ourselves the trouble of breaking a fly upon the wheel. We should say that a few years' diligent practice of her profession in the provinces would be extremely beneficial to her, as to many others we could name whose vaulting ambition has overleaped itself and fallen on the other side."

The truth is, however, that the preoccupation of the *débutante* in question was very excusable indeed. She was not like Warden, who could grasp at shadows without dropping substances: nor could she throw herself into Mr ——'s comedy while she was at the same time playing the principal part in her own.

Don Perez.—"I go, then, proud girl: but if I read woman's soul aright, thou wilt yet be the bride of Don Perez."

Donna Inez.—"Never! Is it thus thou readest woman's soul? Thinkest thou that all Golconda's treasure would buy the heart of Inez? Rather will

I wander in poverty with my Ferdinand than dwell
in halls of dazzling light with thee.

“ If weeping lips and smiling eyes
Within a mossy dell,
Yet through the roaring of the skies,
Oh bid me not farewell !—

Go—and amid thy vassal thralls
Awake the wonder wild—
But Inez scorns thy dazzling halls,
The free, the gipsy child !”—

(Exit.)

“ Ah, Mr Lester, how you startled me ! I scarcely
thought you would be here. I am afraid you will
not be very well amused.”

“ Can you give me a minute or two presently ?
I have something to say to you.”

“ Not quite so loud, please. They will hear you in
the house.”

“ When can I speak to you ? ”

“ Oh, now if you like : only we had better get out
of the way. Now, Hugh, what is it : You look very
grave. It is nothing serious ? ”

“ Indeed it is, Angélique. Have you to go on
again soon ? ”

“ Not for fifteen minutes, at least.”

“ I fear I have done wrongly, Angélique, in not

having told you before, that in marrying me you run the risk of marrying a very poor man indeed. You were right when you thought that my aunt would object to my marriage."

"You come then—to say good-bye? Do not be afraid. I release you." And she sighed profoundly.

"Angélique! Can you——"

"Good-bye then." She held out her hand, turned away her head, and sighed more profoundly still.

"Do you then not love me?"

She threw him for answer one of those glances through the eyelids in which she excelled.

"Then do not," he replied, "let me hear another word of my being released, unless you fear poverty."

"Hugh!"

"Do you think I come to ask you to release me, Angélique? Did you think me so base—so cowardly? Did you think that I would sell you for Earl's Dene?"

"Ah, if it could be! But no—I cannot consent to be the cause of your ruin."

"Angélique—I shall begin to think that you never really loved me."

"How can you speak so cruelly? You know that I have—that I——" "do," she added, in a look.

"Angélique, if you do not love me, it is I that release you. Tell me so, and—— But if you do love me, there is only one way in which you can prove your love. I will accept no other."

"If I thought I could really make you happy—could really compensate you for what you lose——"

"Could I be happy without you?"

"I do not deserve so great a sacrifice."

"It is no sacrifice. Do you think I care a straw for what I lose when I think of what I shall gain? I swear by God that I will not have Earl's Dene without you. In any case I will refuse it."

"And is all the sacrifice—I must call it so—to be on your side?"

"Do you not sacrifice yourself sufficiently by giving yourself to me?"

"Ah, Hugh! you are too noble. No, I cannot find it in my heart to struggle against you—against myself—any longer. I will then be everything to you; my life shall be spent in trying to give you no cause for regret."

"Dearest!" Had she not checked him, he, forgetting as he did where they were, would have taken her in his arms at once.

"But—I must impose a condition."

"What condition?"

"After all, I feel that I am acting selfishly. Whatever you may say, I cannot but know that I am indulging my own heart to your loss. For my own sake let me, too, make a sacrifice. I will be your wife—heaven knows how gladly! But I will not, I ought not, unless you promise me this."

"What is it?"

"A reconciliation with one who loves you as Miss Clare must love you is always possible. I will not let you throw away the chance of it. I declare to you that my whole life would be spent in misery if I thought I had not done all for you that you will let me do. I would have refused you now if I could have done so—but I could not. But I will make another effort to refuse you unless you promise that Miss Clare shall not know of our engagement until we are married."

Hugh looked grave, and almost frowned.

"I am sorry you wish this, Angélique. My aunt has a right to know. Besides, to conceal it would look as though I wished to keep Earl's Dene by deceit—by a sort of fraud."

"Of course she must not think that. But I am so afraid—until we cannot be parted what might not happen to part us? If Miss Clare is so resolved, what might she not do or say——"

"My aunt would never do anything underhand."

"Of course not. But so many things might happen. You promise then? Then now I am quite happy."

"But, dearest——"

"Ah, there is Monsieur Prosper coming to speak to me. But don't go. Monsieur Prosper, this is Mr Lester, an old friend of mine."

"Monsieur, I am charmed. But I would speak with you, Mademoiselle. It is great pity so charming a young lady should never have been in love."

Lester stared at so extraordinary a mode of address. Angélique looked at him and smiled.

"What makes you think I never have been?" she asked Monsieur Prosper. "Is it because I have never been in love with you?"

"Because you sing just as if you had no heart, Mademoiselle. That is why. Excuse me, Monsieur:" and he passed on to resume his post at the conductor's desk. Lester smiled in his turn: he felt that he knew better.

"You know, dearest," he said, when Monsieur Prosper had left them, "that I can refuse you nothing. But if I yield to you in this, there must be no delay in our marriage."

She looked at him affectionately, and suffered him

to hold her hand for a moment: but not for so long a moment that the caress could be observed by any curious eyes.

"We will not talk of that to-night, Hugh. I must consult with Marie, you know. Oh dear—I wish I had not got to go on again."

"And you will not repent joining yourself to one who will have no wealth but your love?"

"How often am I to say no? You are not like Monsieur Prosper, are you, and think that I have no heart?"

"I think so, indeed!——"

And he would no doubt have said something very much to the purpose when "Miss Marchmont!" was called, and she had to leave the drama in which she was acting so well for that in which, according to the 'Trumpet,' she was acting so indifferently.

Her lover was of course in ecstasies. He had never doubted her for a moment: but his triumph was none the less to hear from herself that she was willing to share his fortune whatever it might be. How he was to support her he did not know: but his exultation was too great to be disturbed by a thought which the life that he had hitherto led entirely prevented his being able to bring home to himself. A man who has never known what it is to

want for anything, has great faith in the bounty of Fortune. To couple his own name with that of want, is as practically impossible as to seriously and really couple it with that of death. However it may be in metaphysics, no one can, in the actual world of fact, imagine what he has never known. Now Hugh had never in his life known what it was to want a hundred pounds without being able to get it: so that, *a fortiori*, to realise the probable want of a dinner for two, was entirely out of the question. Rich in love and strength, utterly ignorant of what poverty means, he even looked forward to all the pleasures of necessary toil, and forgot to consider the wearing pains and bitter disappointments that accompany it with no less certainty. And surely, so it seemed to him, the strength and energy that had sufficed to make him the best man of his inches in all —shire, and in all Cambridge to boot, would suffice to clear a path through the world that should be just broad enough for himself and for one other. There was time enough yet to determine the precise manner in which he should exert it, and, at least for the present evening, sufficient unto the day was the evil thereof. Of course, Angélique had no need to indulge in gloomy anticipations. She would indeed be but a bungler if Miss Clare did not die in ignorance not only of the

engagement, but of the marriage also. She knew her own power over her lover : and as he was honest and unsuspecting, she was not afraid of losing it. Besides, is it not the duty of a good wife to guard her husband's interests when he is inclined to destroy them? This part of her duty, at all events, she was resolved to fulfil to the letter.

The result of her resolution was, that not very long after the *début* of Miss Marchmont the following paragraph appeared in the 'Trumpet' :—

"Mr H. Lester, M.P. for Denethorp, has accepted the stewardship of the Chiltern Hundreds. Mr M. Warden, Fellow of St Margaret's College, Cambridge, has issued an address, in which he professes himself a supporter of the Government, and will, in case of a contest, be influentially supported. It is not improbable that Mr Prescott, who unsuccessfully contested the borough at the last general election, will appear once more in the field."

Poor Angélique ! She seemed to have turned out but a female Alnaschar after all. The future Mrs Lester of Earl's Dene, Lady Lester of Earl's Dene, Countess of Denethorp, and heaven knows what besides, woke up to find herself Mrs Lester of nowhere, the wife of a disinherited man who had not even a profession to fall back upon. Added to this, she had

the mortification of seeing that she had been duped most cruelly. Had it not been for Warden's advice, for Warden's suggestions, she would have still been safe : and who but he could have betrayed her secret to Miss Clare ? The question, "*Oui bono ?*" was only too applicable in its proper sense. It was certainly not herself, and it was as certainly not her husband, for the letter which he had written to his aunt upon his marriage she had taken care should not leave London : so that, as it turned out, she had herself made matters worse by causing Miss Clare to think that her nephew had endeavoured to deceive her.

Hugh was infinitely distressed, not by the loss of Earl's Dene, but by this final proof that she who had been a mother to him all his life had withdrawn herself from him for ever : for if she had loved him as a mother, he felt towards her as a son, and his distress was embittered by her complete silence. It needed all his happiness in the possession of Angélique, and all his consciousness of having done what was right and honourable, to reconcile him to this great loss. As to Warden, now that the field was clear, he was more than ever haunted by the thought, "If it were not for Marie !"

CHAPTER XVI.

It very soon appeared that the agony of nervousness to which Marie had been a victim in the presence of Monsieur Prosper, had been the consequence, not of weakness, but of strength. There is no need to give any detailed account of the concert at which she had had to make her *début*, or of the many days preceding it which she spent in a constant succession of cold fits of fear. It is sufficient that the house at which her performance took place was one which in those days gave and withheld musical fame: and that her nervousness was blown into a red-and-white glow of power as soon as she began to feel that strange and subtle sympathy between artist and audience which is at once both the cause and consequence of a true triumph, and to recognise in the perfect silence which is its outward sign the sure herald of a coming burst of applause. In a word, she was accepted at once as few *débutantes* are ever

accepted: and the next day had almost become so famous as to have made enemies as well as friends. Nor were the former by any means without just ground for their depreciatory criticisms. It is true that she had taken everybody by storm, but it was to a great extent in the teeth of orthodox tradition. "*C'était magnifique, mais ce n'était pas la guerre.*" But the most competent judges resemble the most ignorant in this, that they are only too glad to pardon a great many artistic faults for the sake of strength and enthusiasm, seeing that where there are the latter, the former are safe to come in good time: but that where there are not, they can never either be given or acquired. In short, when least expecting it, Monsieur Prosper had become the discoverer of a new star, and he was certainly not the man to hide his light, whether it was original or reflected, under a bushel.

Marie herself, according to her nature, at first objected strongly to adopting at once the semi-public life that her patron urged upon her. She put it that she could not thus expect to support herself for some time: that meanwhile it was absolutely necessary for her to begin at once to earn her own bread and that of her little household: and that she could do this most effectually and safely by pursuing the

more humble path of daily teaching that she had marked out for herself. But, explain her circumstances as she would, Monsieur Prosper would only say,—

“The only road to the skies, Mademoiselle, is up the garret-stairs. Mozart climbed them, Moretti climbed them, I climbed them, everybody who has ever done anything has had to climb them: and you, Mademoiselle, are one whose duty for the present is to starve.”

But though this was his theory, he obtained a few pupils for her in spite of it—just enough to keep the wolf actually from the door—and, for the rest, kept her upon an artistic treadmill. Her external history, therefore, as well after the concert as before it, was far from being eventful.

Not eventful, indeed, but something very much more, in more ways than one. For with whatever justice Mark Warden might repeat to himself, over and over again, “If it were not for Marie,” Marie had at least an equal reason for saying—had it ever occurred to her to say it—“If it were not for Mark!”

The greatest event of all had happened to her, in which all smaller events were merged. In a word, she had done what it is not given to one in ten

thousand to do—she had found out her own true line in life: and it was, unfortunately, not only essentially different from, but antipathetic to, that which should have been hers as the wife of Mark Warden, or, indeed, as the wife of almost any man. To her own intense astonishment it was she, and not her divine cousin, who had turned out to be the swan of the family, and to be confessed as such by other swans. It was not long—thanks partly, no doubt, to the exertions of her patron and tyrant, which went far to counteract the effects of her own modesty and want of self-confidence, but assuredly also in great measure to her own natural genius, which in all lines of art, but most especially in hers, so often and so wonderfully outdoes the effects of the most complete training—before her name was familiar to almost every one in London except her own husband, who was one of those to whom the very highest artistic reputation is meaningless and incomprehensible. He was one of that immense body of often really sensible people who can never be made to regard art as a serious pursuit—on a level in point of seriousness, to say the least of it, with law and trade: who think of it as a means of mere amusement both to the artist and to his audience, and to whom the difference between a Bach and a

grinder of barrel-organs is not so much even as a difference of degree. Under almost any other circumstances his wife, in her ignorance of her own nature, would have been quite content practically to have acted upon this view. Hitherto she had looked upon human sympathy as not only the chief but the only need of her soul: but now she had learned, without having followed the process, that her soul had need of a higher sympathy than one that was merely human and personal, and nothing more. Far different in this respect was she from Félix. He, as it were, had started as an enthusiast and full-blown genius: and all that he had seen and learned had, as has been seen, tended to disgust him. He had expected to find the lives of those who had devoted themselves to art as fair and as beautiful as art itself: and he felt, in consequence, something like the novice in Gustave Doré's picture when he finds himself for the first time surrounded by the gross incarnate torpor in the midst of which he must henceforth waste his enthusiasm and devotion, and to which he must conform unless he chose to seek refuge in the madness of vain revolt. But she, to whom the artist-life was an altogether unknown garden, assimilated, like the bee in the fable, all that was pure and good in it, and left all its

poison unnoticed and unknown. When she found herself treated unjustly—and she had far too much merit not to meet with frequent injustice—she set the cause down to her own shortcomings, and exerted herself all the more to remove the cause. When she was overpraised—and she had far too many faults to deserve all the praise bestowed upon her—she set it down to the kindness of her friends and the generosity of the world, and exerted herself all the more in order that her friends and the world might not bestow their kindness and generosity where either was undeserved. Indeed the critics, whether they blamed or whether they praised, disturbed her mind very little indeed. She was following her art neither for fame nor for wealth, but simply for itself: and indeed she would, in her own way, have continued to follow it, as she had always done, without saying a word about it to anybody, even had chance never thrown her in the way of Monsieur Prosper or any one else. But in that case she certainly would never have followed it in public: and almost the only reason for which she did so now was, that she thereby might, so far as she could, relieve her husband from the burdensome duty of helping her to exist.

Genius is by no means invariably united with a thirst for fame. Indeed it is by no means certain

that such is the case even usually. Fame is always welcome when it comes, of course: but the true spur and aim of genius, in any sense of the word, is its own self-sufficing energy.

Thus it happened that, while Marie knew nothing of her husband's life, he understood less than nothing of hers. He did not even attempt to hide from himself that he regretted the error of his boyhood most bitterly, nor was he deep-sighted enough to see what a prize he had drawn in the great marriage-lottery, as considered even from a paying and practical point of view. As for her, she was still looking forward to doing her duty as a good wife, and was eager to find herself in a position to do it. But even in her case it must be allowed that the bud of her romance had withered without ever having developed into its natural blossom.

She was indeed in a false position altogether. Honest as the day, she was living a lie: and not only so, but acquiescing in it, as though her conduct were the most right in the world. She was a wife, and yet holding a relation to her husband that was less than that of a mistress: less than if she were separated in fact, or divorced in law. They had not even a thought, not even a wish, in common: and what she had become was brought about by far other

hands than those of her husband. He was the same Mark Warden still, in all essential matters: but, even in essential matters, she was no longer the Marie.

And yet, though essentially different, she was still the same—if such a self-contradictory expression is intelligible. In ways, and thoughts, and feelings, and views of life, the celebrated artist must needs differ widely from the obscure country girl: but in other things, happily—in the goodness that is the gift of nature and not of experience—no mental development need work a change. By knowledge, the best sort of purity is only made purer still: and of this best sort was hers.

Of course, among numerous other acquaintances of her own profession, she came to see a good deal of Félix, with whom, to tell the truth, she was considerably disappointed when she saw him for the first time. In her fancy she had always pictured him as being in style and in appearance a kind of romance-hero: and her idea of a romance-hero had by no means been the same as that of her cousin. But it is due to Félix to say that her disappointment was soon over. With many weaknesses on both sides, each had strength of nature enough, and more than enough points of sympathy, to make real friendship between them possible: and those aspects of

character which were weak in the one, were precisely those which were strong in the other. Accordingly this friendship of theirs was of incalculable benefit to both.

Now, to allude to a rather delicate and much-disputed topic, it may be very true that friendship, in the true sense of a word which expresses the highest of all human relations, does not often come to exist between a man and a woman unless the age of one or both is such as to render the intrusion of passion unlikely: and not very often then. But such age is not necessarily old age. The youth that belongs to the artist-nature and not to fewness of years has this privilege, at least, that it is capable of experiencing and comprehending the effect of sentiment which not only is not born of passion, but does not even necessarily result in it—of that order of sentiment which is mere foolishness and a stumbling-block to men who pique themselves upon knowing the world, and upon calling things by their right names. The truth is, that the artist nature is always rather sentimental than passionate. He whose nature leads him to make a conscious or unconscious study of emotion for purposes of reproduction, cannot be so completely under the influence of the passions and sentiments that he himself undergoes, as the

man who simply feels and suffers, and never attempts to analyse. The great high-priest of Art, never forgetting the beat of the measure of his hexameters even in the very embrace of his mistress, is only a type of illustrations that might be multiplied by thousands. It is certainly not that the lives of artists are more pure than those of other men and women: but it is that their souls have lived in the expression and imagination of passion rather than in passion itself. With the ordinary man, passion is its own aim—with the artist, it is but a means to produce sentiment: and if sentiment can be produced without the aid of passion, there is no reason why passion need have anything to do with the matter.

In other words, the swine will revel in the mud for the mud's sake, without reference to the pearls that may have been cast therein: the higher nature will cast itself into the mud also, but it will be in order to rout out the pearls: and if the pearls are thrown upon a clean place, it will not care for the mud at all.

This may seem to be rather a transcendental way of regarding a fiddler and a music-mistress who came to know each other intimately, and did not happen to fall in love. Nevertheless it is not to be taken in the light of a digression.

Marie had until now lived a life as hidden from herself as it had been from others. It was as though she had been asleep in the enchanted forest. Her soul had indeed been none the less that of the artist, but it had not as yet eaten of the tree of knowledge. To speak more prosaically, she had not the least idea that she differed in any way from other girls of her own age, except that she was rather more stupid and very much more shy: though, in reality, she could not have proved that she possessed something of the higher nature more than by being content to be what she was, and by doing what she could to develop what she had. But now that she had found admittance into a region the inhabitants of which were openly and consciously interested in all that had always unconsciously interested her, and who accepted her thoughts and ways as if they placed her above instead of below the crowd, she felt, if not like the sleeping princess when the prince arrived at the end of the hundred years of slumber, yet at all events like the supposed duckling when it first found itself with its own kind. Here it was that the sympathy of Félix made itself useful, by teaching her the spirit of the language of her new world, and by making her feel her own strength, which was now developing itself rapidly and surely.

But if he gave much, he received very much more than he gave: not that his was by any means the lower nature in all respects, but it certainly was in some. Friendship cannot exist where the superiority is all on one side; and that, certain women-scorners may be tempted to say, may be the reason why friendship between men and women is, to say the least of it, so rare: while, on the other hand, there are others who might account for the same fact on a similar but opposite ground. Thus, like many young artists—and like some old ones too, for that matter—he was too much inclined to the charlatanism of playing the genius, of railing at social rules, and of glorifying the land of Bohemia, not as a region where it is right that the apprentice of art should pass some of his *Wander-Jahre*, his years of travel, but as a home to be lived in and loved for its own sake. But, after the manner of his kind, he was intensely capable of taking the impress of others' natures without in the least degree losing the original mould of his own: and however much sympathy Marie came to have with the man himself, she had no sympathy with vanity, or with any of its external symptoms. Charlatanism of every kind was bound to feel itself ridiculous before her harmonious directness of thought and speech: and she could not see

that it is better in itself to be poor than to be rich, better to be at war than to be at peace, better to make the worst than the best of things. Her own road might have to lie through Bohemia: but she had her own Stratford, her own Daylesford, beyond its borders.

Nor was it only by her directness of nature and by her good sense that she did him good. He was alone in the world, and had always been so: and though he had often found kindness and good comradeship, this kind of sympathy was something altogether new to him. Every one needs sometimes to talk freely and sincerely about himself to somebody: every one needs sometimes to make confession, and no one is fit to be his own confessor. Félix was no exception to the rule. On the contrary, free speech was indeed to him the mind's morning, that

“Spreads the beauteous images abroad,
Which else lie furled and clouded in the soul.”

He was filled with dreams and fancies to overflowing, which, had he not met with her, would have been in a fair way to become corrupt and morbid.

But it must not for a moment be supposed that he in the least degree thus escaped from the tyranny of his *grande passion*. Temperaments like his are in-

variably far more influenced by the cruelty than by the kindness of a mistress: nor, ridiculous as such a disposition may appear to modern notions, is it by any means a sign of weakness, except so far as one may apply the word weakness to generosity, unselfishness, faith, loyalty, and other kindred qualities. Accordingly, in this matter, there was some reticence between them. But still they did speak of it, and of her who had been and was still the heroine of the life-story of which Marie now became the first and only confidante.

Nor must it be supposed, either, that Félix took the to him inexplicable breach between himself and Angélique by any means calmly. Friendship is no substitute for passion. Nor could Marie help seeing how things were going: and though it was impossible for her to accept the fact that Angélique could by any possibility do wrong, the state of things made her very unhappy indeed. At last the day came when all was over: when her cousin threw herself into her arms, and told her that she was now Mrs Lester. What Marie answered was inaudible through tears, partly of sympathy, partly of sorrow. But she did insist upon one thing—that Félix should be told at once how matters stood: and she was brave enough to undertake herself to be his informant.

So one day she sent for him suddenly, and as gently and kindly as she could—that is to say, with all possible gentleness and kindness—told him the news. The pill that he had to swallow was bitter, but he could not complain of any want of tenderness on the part of his physician.

Then she went on to make excuses for Angélique.

“Yes,” she said, “it would have been best if she could have told you at once that she had mistaken her heart. But then, you must remember how young she was—what a girl she is still. If you only knew how difficult it often is for any girl to know her own heart——”

“Oh, you need not be afraid,” he answered, with false composure; “I am not going to complain of her. What you say is doubtless all most true.”

But his false composure did not deceive her.

“If you only knew how distressed she herself is: how anxious she is that you should not think harshly of her: how she hopes for your happiness——”

“Marie,” he said, in a firm voice, “if she is happy, that ought to be enough for me, and shall be. Tell her—no, you need tell her nothing; what is there to tell?”

"I wish she could have loved you," said Marie at last, after a long pause.

"Well — now I suppose I am married to Art in earnest," he answered, with a shade of bitterness.

"We are all of us young yet," she replied, with the air of earnest gravity which sometimes gave her face such an almost ludicrous sort of piquancy. "And you have all the world before you. After all, there is no woman—no, none—who is worth a man's career."

It was curious that Marie should have used almost the very words of a man like Monsieur Prosper. But then her meaning was not quite the same.

Certainly the words that had been spoken between them had been cold enough. When two persons are very strongly moved, their words are always cold: and very often their manner also. But the words and manner of Félix did not deceive Marie in the least degree. She knew only too well what their coldness meant—how the reaction would come when her presence no longer acted as a restraint upon him. Far from being afraid of a scene, she would have been only too glad if he had set his whole heart free before her.

But he took her hand and thanked her instinctively with his eyes : for what, he knew not.

It is all very well, however, to enjoy the sympathy of an amiable woman from whom one is only too well disposed to receive it : but to receive the commiseration of a man, however kindly meant, is in such cases by no means so pleasant. As he was leaving the house of Marie he was caught hold of in the street by Monsieur Prosper, among whose virtues delicacy was certainly not included.

There can be nothing more miserable than, with a heart swollen almost to bursting, with an aching breast, throbbing brain, and sightless eyes, suddenly to meet in the public streets one with whom we are bound to speak as though nothing had happened of more consequence than a change in the weather. But it is still worse than this when our acquaintance happens to be one who, out of a sort of half-perverse, half-kindly instinct, insists, as a matter of course, upon plunging at once into the very subject which better tact would have taught him to avoid. We then have to smile ten times as much as there is any need, to talk ten times as lightly, to let him say what he will, even though at every word he tramples upon a thousand corns. And the worst of it is, that when, under such circumstances as those

of Félix, we are striving to bury our heads in the sand, we are certain to be caught hold of by our own particular Monsieur Prosper.

"So it seems that my fair pupil has run away with a duke, or a marquess,—which is it? Well, so much the better for you. I know something of the women, *ma foi!* and congratulate you from my soul. If you had married that girl, you would have been frittered away in no time. Bah! my dear fellow, I am only speaking the truth. I grant you she is charming—unmarried. Now her cousin—there would be an artist's companion for you, if she were not an artist herself. She would work by a man's side, even if she didn't lead the way; and an attic or a palace—all would be the same to her. I only hope to heaven she will never marry, though! A wife may be a good artist, but as soon as she becomes a mother it is all over with her. Bah! it's lucky for this Angélique of yours that her duke or marquess, or whoever he is, is a rich man, or I shouldn't envy him his bargain."

If Félix had not broken down before Marie, it was not likely that he would do so before Monsieur Prosper.

"He is neither duke nor marquess," he said: "and I hear that he has given up everything for her sake."

"Don't you believe such nonsense. No, my boy—a man will give up much for a woman, but not everything. I daresay, if the truth were known, Antony found it quite worth his while to lose the world just for the sake, not of keeping Cleopatra, but of getting rid of Octavia. What are you going to do now? Will you come and dine?" A dinner seemed to be his panacea for all the ills of the world.

"I am engaged."

"Engaged? that's just what I thought you were no longer! Oh, here's Barton—why, everybody seems about to-day."

So indeed it seemed to Félix, at all events.

"Ah, Créville," said Barton, "we haven't met for an age. Why, what's up? You look as if your liquor hadn't agreed with you last night. Is it true, Prosper, that that Miss Marchmont that came out in your 'Faith's Reward,' you know, is married to ten thousand a-year? I shouldn't think it was on the strength of my notice of her in the 'Trumpet.' She was a pretty girl, though. By the way, what's her real name?"

"She was a Miss Lefort."

"By Jove! and her Christian name?"

"Angélique."

Barton burst into one of his explosions of laughter, which made Prosper stare curiously and Félix angrily.

"I half guessed as much," he went on, between his bursts of laughter.

"Pray, may I ask why?" asked Félix, rather sternly.

Barton, struck by something in his tone, glanced at him, and then whistled.

"Oh, never mind," he said. "I say, Prosper, what are you going to do? And you too, Créville?"

"I must go home now," said Félix, turning to Prosper: and he walked off without farther ceremony.

"A rival?" asked Barton.

Prosper shrugged his shoulders. "Poor boy!" he said to himself.

"By the way, is there any other Miss Lefort?"

"*Nom!* I should think so!"

"And is her name Marie?"

"What—do you know her?"

"Not in the least. But we have a mutual friend, I fancy. By Jove! it would be a good joke. Tell me about her."

"Willingly: and as Félix won't dine with me, perhaps you will?"

“ More than willingly, if I have not forgotten by this time how to dine at all.”

As to Félix, he had long had a presentiment that his *grande passion* must eventually come to this: but the fulfilment of a presentiment is never the more easy to bear because it has been foreseen. And now that he reached home and could indulge in the luxury of solitude, the reaction feared by Marie fairly came: and before long he had reached one of those moods in which men of his impulsive and excitable temperament are as likely as not to do something desperate.

CHAPTER XVII.

AND so it came about that Hugh Lester found himself all of a sudden no longer a rich man and his own master, but a poor man, burdened with a wife and with the necessity of earning his own bread : and that Angélique, instead of having become the heiress of Earl's Dene, found herself the wife of one who, as far as appearances went, was much more likely to sink in the scale of society than to rise in it. She had better by far have thrown in her lot with Félix after all, even as a matter of prudence. He, at all events, could not well sink lower than where he was, and was in a position to earn a crust, if nothing more.

To repeat her dramatic experiment was quite out of the question. Her *fiasco* had quite put her out of court : nor did Monsieur Prosper or any other dealer in talent think sufficiently well of her merit to care to exert himself to recover her position for her.

Besides, Hugh, with his social theories, would have starved, and would almost have let her starve, rather than have permitted her, now that she was his wife, to remain on or to return to the stage, even though she had been possessed of the power of a Siddons or a Pasta. The duty of supporting her was now, he considered, his entirely: and not only must he support her, but in a way that should be entirely free from doubt or suspicion. No man can change his caste at will: and though in the eyes of the world he was no longer Mr Lester of Earl's Dene, still he was by no means one to think that he had, with the advantages of his old position, given up its duties also. And then he was no doubt influenced by an unwillingness, that would be common to most men under similar circumstances, to leave a young and beautiful bride among the associations of the green-room.

Perhaps, however, he would not have felt quite so scrupulous upon this point had he been less filled with hope and courage than he was. He was not conscious, in his altered circumstances, of any diminution of strength, or, as yet—though the consciousness of this would have to come very speedily—of any want of ready money: and, though bitterly grieved that his aunt had thrown him over so

utterly, so suddenly, and, above all, apparently so unkindly—thanks to Angélique's cleverness in confiscating his letter—he was proud of having been able to prove his love by engaging in that war with the world which to lookers-on appears so romantic and heroic, but which to those who are actually engaged in it is so inexpressibly prosaic, and sordid, and mean. He had done what lovers are for the most part contented with expressing their willingness to do: he had renounced all for the sake of her whom he loved.

It is easy and pleasant enough to imagine one's self, continually inspired by some lofty aim or motive, with a front always kept straight to the foe, and a heart always firm, and serene, and of good cheer, fighting one's way bravely through the world, drawing true friends to one's side, and before long prevailing by dint of sheer strength and honour. Just so may a boy whose imagination is fascinated by the idea of the career of arms, picture war to himself as a glorious succession of forlorn-hopes and desperate charges. But let the modern Don Quixote, putting his theory into practice, actually give up his peace and comfort and plunge into the grotesque medley of hopeless and heart-sickening delays, of lingering wounds, of blundering, of treachery, and of

cowardice, that make up the greater portion of the world's war, and he will be more than fortunate if in a very short time his high aim does not become directed to getting the upper hand in a bargain, if experience does not teach him that to keep his front to the foe is to court death and not victory, and if he does not learn that the crowding of friends to his side is the consequence of success, and never its cause.

But all this Hugh had yet to learn. He was really strong enough to do with ease many things from which brave men shrink. To proclaim his altered fortunes, and to give up his former society before his former society gave up him, was as easy and almost as inspiring as a flourish of trumpets accompanying a declaration of war : and it was with a positive eagerness that he hastened to throw over all his engagements, to mortify his tailor by paying him, and to astonish the most exclusive club in London by removing his name from the list of its members. So far it was upon Angélique, who had brought about the situation, that it bore most heavily.

At first her anger and disappointment were extreme. She had done worse than lose the trick—she had been cheated : nor did it occur to her that she had been cheated just because her own game had

not been open and straightforward. Fortunate was it for Hugh that the marriage was not of long standing, or doubtless the storm would have fallen upon his own head : and as things were, it was not that she was too much in love with him to make him her scapegoat, but that she could not help feeling some gratitude to him for his sacrifice of the world for her sake, and for his vain attempt to save her from sacrificing herself for his, and that the circumstance was too recent to have fallen even from so short a memory as hers. And so it was for Warden alone that she kept the storm that was brewing within her. After all, when she came to consider the matter, the game was not wholly lost. Miss Clare might yet be reconciled, or might die without a will—in fact the chapter of accidents contained a hundred chances in her favour, though those against her might be a thousand. Soon she found herself saying, instead of “Suppose I were Mrs Lester of Earl’s Dene,” “I *will* be Mrs Lester of Earl’s Dene—and let Mark Warden look well to his cards !”

In short, it was to be a duel *à la mort* between them for the prize of Earl’s Dene, and both parties had their advantages. Mark Warden was so far the victor : but then he had no fear of his opponent, and was likely to play blind.

This determination of hers made her also resolve to remain good friends with her husband. If he was no longer to be her highroad to fortune, it was still he who must provide the material and the instruments for making it: and meanwhile she must manage to play the part of the good wife as best she might. That he was as happy with her as he tried to persuade himself he was, can scarcely be said with truth after the flight of the first few weeks of triumph: but he found no tangible reason to complain. Indeed it is the way of such as he not only to make the best of a bad bargain, but to persuade themselves into the belief that it is a good one.

Nevertheless, symptoms of its having turned out not the best of all possible bargains began very soon to show themselves. With the best will in the world to appear good-tempered, she could not altogether, with perfect success, contrive to seem what she was not: and she was too genuinely disappointed not sometimes, out of the fulness of her heart, to give expression to her disappointment. It was inconceivably bitter to her to have to bear small troubles and annoyances, such as having to economise in clothes, to haggle with small tradesmen about ounces and halfpence—a matter, by the way, in which her disgust did not prevent her proving herself a most ad-

mirable woman of business—and to find no admiration save on the part of her husband and from the chance passengers of the streets. Hugh, too, often bored her terribly, and she could not help sometimes showing that he bored her by yawning in his face, both literally and metaphorically. He, in his good-nature, used to set down her little crop of shortcomings to the account of his own selfishness. He tried to make up to her in every possible way for what he had made her lose, and never dreamed of laying his failure at her door.

As for a reconciliation with his aunt, he had given up all idea of that as entirely out of the question; and, too wise to cry over spilled milk, made up his mind not to dream of the impossible, but to turn himself to whatever work might lie next his hands.

This again was all very well; but it was by no means so well when he came to ask himself for what he was fit, and what he could do. The question was infinitely more easy than the answer. He had no profession, and had been brought up to none: he knew nothing but the "*As in præsentis*," and the "*Propria quæ maribus*," which it had taken him some fifteen years to learn: he could do nothing but hunt, and shoot, and fish, and in general follow all such pursuits as cost a great deal of money, but

bring in none — unless, indeed, he turned game-keeper or huntsman : and even then he would lack the professional apprenticeship that in every pursuit distinguishes the artist from the amateur.

Nor were such influential persons as he had in his prosperous days numbered among his acquaintance particularly willing to help him now. In the book of the world of patronage he had written himself down far too great an ass to be within the pale of legitimate help. His vote and influence were lost to his party for ever : and lost, moreover, through his own fault. Besides, he was as yet too proud to be a beggar, as, indeed, every gentleman ought to be until necessity, as necessity usually ends in doing, has thickened his skin very considerably.

But though, to reverse the condition of the unjust steward, he could not beg, to dig he was not ashamed : and he would have dug with pleasure had there been any room in England for an unpractised spade. And so it was before long borne in upon him that he had better wash his hands of the soil of England altogether, and go somewhere, where digging may be had for the asking.

This caused the first open dispute—it did not amount to a quarrel — between himself and his bride. What ! should she, a lady and the wife of

a gentleman, give up the battle at once before it was lost, and go and bury herself alive in the backwoods among bears both quadruped and biped? should she spend her hours and days and years in cooking and scrubbing, and washing and mending, and bringing up a rough race of colonial farmers and their wives? No; it was certainly not for that that she had become the wife of Hugh Lester. If she also had made a bad bargain, she too would try to make the best of it—but by improving it, and by expending upon it time and trouble: not by sitting down and putting up with it. She was not made beautiful to blush unseen, nor clever and endowed with aristocratic tastes to waste her tastes and talents in a wigwam. The life of an “extra lady”—in the theatrical sense—would be better than that. And so she managed to make herself so infinitely disagreeable whenever Hugh even alluded to the subject of emigrating, that he very soon had to allude to it no more. She said but little indeed, and what she did say was always strictly and becomingly submissive: but she submitted like a martyr: and such submission on the part of a woman to the man who is in love with her is simply irresistible, as most women well know. Griseldis will always win in the long run—and, generally speaking, in the short run also.

There is no need here to tell in all its details the whole story of Hugh Lester's troubles: how he spent his days in wandering about the streets, and his evenings in discussing with his wife plans with which she had no sympathy, and in which she consequently took no interest. Could he in the course of his wanderings have hit upon a plan for getting unmarried, well and good: but, as things were, she was much too occupied with her own more important schemes to care much about his. She was by no means so proud in her difficulties as he. Unknown to him, she wrote to Alice Raymond, describing the position of herself and her husband, and with such good effect that the young lady made a resolute attempt to act the part of peacemaker between Miss Clare and Hugh. It need not be said that her well-meant attempt met with no success whatever: that, indeed, it made matters rather worse than before. Then Angélique tried to persuade Hugh himself to go down upon his knees to his aunt: but great as her influence over him was, especially when she chose to exert it actively, in this he was firm. All that he had to say he had already said in that letter whose fate was known to Angélique alone. And then, at last, in spite of her courage and confidence in her own skill, she could

not but own that the battle seemed going dead against her.

But she did not know how heavily her enemy was weighted. Member of Parliament, indeed, he had a fair prospect of becoming, and a prospect of becoming in due course of time eminent at the bar that was scarcely less fair. But to become master of Earl's Dene, of the real prize of the war, it was necessary for him first to become the master of Alice Raymond.

Of course that was quite out of the question. But still it must be confessed that he used to see a great deal more of her than was at all necessary, unless he really meant work. He was, in fact, so much in love with Earl's Dene, not to speak of New Court, that he was every day more and more in love with the lady in whom their charms were incarnate: or at least fancied himself so, which, in such matters, means much the same thing. He used to hang about her, to feel jealous of her other acquaintance, and to let her see plainly that he cared more about her than about all the rest of the world put together. To what end, it may well be asked, when it could not by any possibility lead to anything? Well, men are in such cases—that is to say, where gold and women are concerned—guided mainly by im-

pulse : and practical wisdom, such as Warden's, is apt to think mainly of the means, knowing well how often they bring about their own end.

And what did Alice Raymond think? She was not a girl to fall easily over head and ears in love with anybody, and certainly not until she was asked to do so : and yet she did not act as though she were altogether unwilling that the question should come. She had, for a woman, most marvellously little pride of family or of station, in this resembling her mother, whom she bade fair to resemble in many other things. She had no need to marry for wealth, and if she chose to marry the son of a country surgeon, she had no one but herself to please. She believed in brains, and this surgeon's son seemed to her to have more brains than all the rest of her acquaintance put together—as indeed very likely he had. Still she had not thought about the matter to any very alarming degree. She would not be surprised at his having the presumption to ask her to marry him, nor would she consider it a presumption : but she had not by any means taken the precaution beforehand of making up her mind whether she should say yes or no. This is as much as to say that she had given him a good deal of hope—more, perhaps, than she consciously intended, but not more than she was

willing that he should have, for he stood more than high enough in her good graces to make her feel flattered by his attention to her.

It could not but result from this that the idea of becoming great and rich at one *coup* came to exercise greater and greater fascination over the mind of Warden day by day and almost hour by hour: and none the less because the idea was apparently so eminently unpractical. When a practical man like himself does manage to get an unpractical notion into his head, and when he believes himself to be incapable of entertaining any but practical notions, he is fortunate if it does not run away with him into the region of monomania. Certainly the legitimate road to fortune seemed in his eyes to be desperately slow, now that he had obtained a vision of what is contained in those words of despair, "Might have been." He, like Angélique, was not content to sit down quietly and make the best of what he chose to consider his bad bargain. He had by this time fairly got past the stage of "If it were not for Marie"—from which to "How can I possibly get rid of Marie?" is only a single step, and scarcely so much as that. How he cursed the law that had made him thus suffer for his boyish impulse! But easy as it had hitherto been to conceal it, it was

impossible for him to deny his marriage, which he had taken care should be only too valid. It had been nothing more than a ceremony, it is true: and, in reality, he and Marie were no more husband and wife than they were in the eyes of the world. There were no children to insist upon their rights of legitimacy in time to come: and he felt the burden of no duties of use or affection. If, for the sake of the good things that surrounded and were represented by her, he fancied that he loved Alice Raymond, he in the same way and by the same process was rapidly coming, without any fancy in the matter, to detest Marie as the one obstacle to his obtaining that for which his whole soul hungered. What earthly reason, he asked himself, was there why he should be willing to cleave to Marie in full sight of the rich prize that was passing within reach of his hands? She was not beautiful: she was stupid—so he thought, for the nature of her development was a sealed book to him: she had no sympathy with his aims—which was perfectly true: she was not his equal in any respect—which was most certainly true also: and, above all, she was quite incapable of being of the least use to him. He had never lived with her, and had not the least wish to do so; nor, he thought with inconsistent anger, did she show any very eager

or overpowering desire to live with him. Her very devotion to his interests and contented sacrifice of her own, and her willingness to submit to him in all things, had, as is often the case, succeeded rather in mortifying his vanity than in gratifying it, and he would probably have been far less indifferent to her had she given him more cause. He went near her very seldom now: and, to tell the truth, his vanity would have been mortified even more had he been able to guess how little he had come to be missed by her. The welcome that he received from her on the occasions of his rare visits was to the full as honest and as affectionate as of old: but Marie had become by this time so accustomed to the peculiar relation that had now existed between herself and her husband for so many long years, while her new life and her new friendship gave her mind so much occupation, that she was by no means any longer condemned to spend her time after the manner of the lady of the Moated Grange. Besides, she still trusted him implicitly: and, while he was away, assumed that he was seeing the less of her now in order that he might put things in train for seeing the more of her hereafter. For the same purpose she too worked as hard as possible, in order that when the time should come she might earn the satisfaction of plac-

ing in his hands the fruit of her industry, and of her zeal to bring nearer the day when he could throw overboard that hateful Fellowship and make her his wife before the world.

Her very calmness and patience at last provoked him beyond measure. He forgot that they were the result of habits that he himself had made her acquire, and of hopes that he himself had bestowed. And then there is no doubt that she bored him dreadfully, and did not see that she bored him. She was interested in all that he was doing, in his legal studies, in his political ambition, not because she cared a single straw about either law or politics, or was in the least degree ambitious for herself, but simply because they occupied him : and she assumed, and surely not unwarrantably, that he would take an interest in her pursuits because they were hers. But what cared he to listen to all the musical shop and gossip which is so intensely interesting to those who care about music itself, but so unutterably tiresome and contemptible to those who do not ? All shop is necessarily odious to those who do not themselves stand behind the counter, or at least care very much for some one who does stand there. But when one both despises the shop and hates the shopwoman it is sickening indeed : and it offended this parvenu to

think that his wife had to perform in public for her bread.

After all, is it not almost a truism that life is a perpetual attempt to grasp the good that is out of our reach, and to throw away the good that is within it? Whether it be true or not, as Warden once tried to persuade himself, that the mould of each man's fortune is in his own hands, it is at all events certain that a man has but to close his fingers upon his palm to secure possession of his best good. But like the knight who roamed all over the world to seek for the fairest flower in it, but did not find it until, outwearied with the search, it met his eyes as he re-entered his own castle-yard, most men are so tremendously far-sighted that they are blind to anything that is less than a league distant from them: and Mark Warden was, as must by this time have fully appeared, more long-sighted even than most men. Earl's Dene, as it loomed upon him in the distance, was visible enough to him: but Marie looked to him like a mere speck of dust that had lighted upon him, and which it would be as well to brush off as quickly as possible—or rather like a burr, as valueless as dust, and infinitely more disagreeable.

Had she been other than she was, his entire neglect of her would more than probably have brought

about the very worst possible consequences. She was quite good-looking enough to be considered pretty now that she had come into notice, and there were quite enough people about her to tell her so. It was certainly not his fault that the desire to be free did not become mutual. She had to live and go about entirely alone, looking for aid and counsel to any one rather than to him from whom aid and counsel were due. Being what she was even, such a state of things could not in any wise be safe, seeing that her professional father and guide was Monsieur Prosper, whose ideas as to the limits of propriety were not over-strict, to say the least of it. He would have been as much opposed to the idea of her spoiling herself, as he would consider it, by taking a husband, as he was to that of Félix taking a wife, or rather more so; for if a man who is an artist is, according to his theory, necessarily ruined by marriage, how much more must an artist who is a woman be ruined by it? But short of marriage, and of any connection equivalent thereto, he certainly held that an artist, whether man or woman, should know by experience what is meant by passion as well as by sentiment: and Marie's extreme prudence of conduct which, according to the light that was in him, he could only ascribe to coldness of nature, provoked

him almost as much as her passive obedience provoked Warden. It nearly made him think that he must have been mistaken in her: and indeed he told her as much sometimes. But she never even approached to a comprehension of what he meant. She was certainly still very stupid indeed about some things, and seemed likely to continue so.

But Monsieur Prosper was not much of a believer in the virtue of any woman, much less in that of a woman who seemed to be a paragon: and the friendship between his *protégés* could for him have but one meaning. His supposition was favoured by the manner in which Félix received his attempts to rally him upon his having, when every one else had failed, been able to play the part of Endymion to this immaculate and miraculous Diana. It was almost the cause of another temporary quarrel between this pair of ill-matched friends, and ought, no doubt, to have made Félix himself rather more careful and circumspect for the sake of Marie. But, after all, is the world, which spoils so many good things, not to leave at liberty at least one pleasant relation, and that the pleasantest of all? At least Félix, conscious as he was of meaning no harm, was not one to think that the voice of the world, as represented by that of Monsieur Prosper, had the smallest

right to affect his conduct in this matter in the least degree: and so, even as he had actively scorned his friend's advice in respect of Angélique, he passively disregarded it in respect of her cousin. Of course he ought to have remembered the fable of the frogs and the boys. Of course everybody ought to do everything that is exactly right and proper on all occasions. But who ever did apply a moral to his own case? And what man who is not a monster of rectitude would have the heart to dream of crushing the rare bud of friendship when it is developing into blossom before his eyes?

It need not be said that Warden, for his part, had far too much to think about on his own account to take much notice of the persons with whom his wife associated, or that, if he had taken notice of them, he would particularly have cared, or that, if he had cared, he would have considered that he had the least reason to be jealous of Félix Créville. But it did happen that one evening, by a planned accident—and the planning of such accidents was beginning to take up a great deal of his time, even to the extent of leading him astray from his law studies—he met Miss Raymond at a large party given at a very great house indeed, and that she, who never forgot her friends or neglected to ask after them,

seeing that they might at any moment fall within reach of the help that she was always seeking to extend not only to them but to all the world, lost no time in introducing the subject, as was her way, much to Warden's dislike, whenever she happened to meet him.

"What a great personage Marie Lefort is becoming all at once!" she said. "I remember we all used to think her such a stupid child."

"Yes, she seems to be doing well," said Warden, coldly. "But I don't profess to know anything about music, you know."

"I suppose you are always thinking about your horrid law. I wish you did care about music, though. I always want my friends to like what I do."

"Ah, Miss Raymond, if you would educate me, perhaps I might become a second Händel—who knows?" The choice of Händel for his illustration was not accidental: it was because it was the only name to which his knowledge of musical history allowed him to refer. He had once been at a performance of the "Messiah" in Redchester Cathedral, and had only been saved from being very much bored by employing his time in meditation upon a problem in conic sections,

"Oh, I am far too stupid. If you want educating

I must refer you to Marie. How is it, by the way, she does not get married? She ought, ought she not? I was having quite a long talk about her only this morning.—Was it not an honour? Monsieur Prosper came to ask me to let him dedicate something to me.”

“He is not the only person, I fancy, who would like the honour of dedicating something to you—and not only music.”

For a wrangler and college Fellow the compliment was not amiss. She blushed ever so little, and accepted it without a remark. Warden's heart gave a little bound of pride, for he felt that she had cared to apply what he had said, and he remembered that “she who blushes and is silent says enough.”

“It was what he said,” she continued, “that made me think about Marie marrying!”

“Indeed!”

“As you know her so well, did you ever happen to come across a rather striking-looking young man who once gave me a few lessons when I was in Paris? Créville, his name is. He seems to be a very great friend of hers—so Monsieur Prosper says—and is very clever and very respectable.”

Was it possible, then, that Marie, the immaculate, could be carrying on a flirtation parallel with his

own? His own conscience did not prick him in the least—there is no law against a married man's being as attentive as he likes to as many pretty girls as he pleases, nor against his leaving his wife to take care of herself, if she is so minded: but, though he did not feel jealous, he certainly felt surprised.

"Créville?" he asked. "No, I never met him."

"Monsieur Prosper speaks very highly of him indeed, and evidently thinks him *éprouvé*. I cannot bear to think of that poor girl going through all she does all alone: and I should be so glad if she could marry well in her own class."

There was certainly not much in these few and commonplace words, but where the soil is fertile and well prepared a very little seed will go a long way: and, slight as they were, they were so far destined to bear fruit as to give him, or rather to suggest to him, a possible way out of his difficulties.

After all, what could it signify to the world, or to themselves, if he and Marie should agree to be henceforth to each other as though nothing had ever taken place between them? Such an arrangement, could it be carried out, would interfere with no rights of any other persons, and it would leave each of the two parties to it free to follow whatever course he and she might severally prefer. If it were true—

and why should it not be true?—that Marie had found a lover, she would be only too willing to fall in with the idea: and if she had already cast off the yoke in part, she could not fairly object to his casting it off altogether. Perhaps he might even be able to persuade her that they were not really married at all, seeing that they had never lived together, and that the ceremony between them had been more or less clandestine. Any way, she would in no wise suffer: and if Monsieur Prosper, according to Miss Raymond, was right, she, judging her by himself, would be only too happy to grasp at the idea, so as to be free to indulge her own inclination. At all events something must be done: and it was absolutely necessary to get himself fairly free of the old love, if in any possible way it could be managed, before he made any farther attempt to advance himself in the good graces of the new. Even if he should fail in his great *coup*, it would be something to have cast off his burden: for no man of mature years ever longed to be able to get clear of a miserable and discreditable connection in which boyish folly had inextricably bound him, more than Warden longed to get clear of one who would have made him the best and most suitable of wives, both in reality and in the eyes of the world.

Another reason led him to this resolve. He had tried his very hardest to quarrel with Barton: but the latter, who would never let any one quarrel with him unless he himself pleased, seemed to take a malicious sort of delight in persecuting him with his unwelcome society as much as possible. It was the old story of Frankenstein over again. The truth is, that the unfortunate scholar had very few places left now where he could sit and get drunk *gratis*: for the good resolutions which he had been continually making when living with Félix vanished, as a matter of course, whenever temptation fell in his way. Now he was one of those men who cannot even be thrust out by main force by any one whose strength is not that of Hercules: and in point of self-assertion, even Warden himself, who was in general fully competent to hold his own, was not a match for him. The latter might sport his oak as much as he pleased, and give any number of orders to the boy who opened his door for him that he was not at home: but against a man like Barton nothing short of a pistol-bullet is of the least service, and the skin of Barton himself appeared thick enough to withstand the passage even of a cannon-ball.

But this was not the worst. He had of late taken to chaff his unwilling and despairing host in a man-

ner that was as disagreeable as it was mysterious. He was perpetually indulging in not very delicately expressed hints about the manner of life popularly held to have been led by the monks of old time having descended to their collegiate successors, in anticipations of Tennyson's Princess—though not quite in such graceful language—and in speculations as to the result of the coexistence of Fellows and Fellowesses, both at the high table and elsewhere, and in other suggestions and allusions that made Warden more afraid than desirous of offending him. At last it was impossible for him to help suspecting that Barton somehow or other had got to know too much: and he knew perfectly well that the latter not only told anything and everything, when in his cups, to anybody and everybody, but would take a direct and positive pleasure in proving that the sober and steady Mark Warden was not only no better than other men, but had obtained and was holding his Fellowship and his reputation upon false pretences. When dealing with such a man the false conscience that comes of fear made him feel guilty in the matter of the *pasquinade*, mere commonplace election trick as it had been, and he had ever since been expecting some sort of retaliation. It was of course just as likely as not—perhaps more likely

than not—that these hints on Barton's part were the mere loose and random talk of a man who never much regarded what he said, and that their real applicability was the result of a mere coincidence: but whether moved by conscience or not, Warden felt that he could not safely rely even upon the probability, far less upon the possibility, of the truth of such a view for the consolation of feeling secure. It puzzled him considerably to account for the existence of such a suspicion on the part of Barton, just as it would have puzzled him to account for its existence on the part of any one else: but it was certainly not rendered the less alarming for its being unaccountable. To fall into the power of such a man would be a terrible thing indeed: and this thought made it all the more incumbent upon him to rid himself of his burr at any price, and almost anyhow. The instinct of self-preservation had come to the support of the instinct of self-interest. Fear and hope were both drawing him in one and the same direction, and so strongly, and to such good purpose, as to leave him almost as few scruples as they had left to the man who had strangled his wife at Gorsley. Had he been capable of self-analysis, he would now have known perfectly well why that story had made so unaccountable an impression upon him. It is not

that he was likely to go to work in so clumsy a way: but it is quite possible to strangle without hands, and to effect one's purpose with weapons that slay and leave no sign.

Of course he did not know it; but he felt very much like the brigand who, on suddenly, at a turn of the road, coming upon a gallows upon which swung the body of one of his band, instead of taking warning from the sight, merely shrugged his shoulders, heaved a passing sigh, and murmured with contemptuous compassion, "*maladroit!*"

CHAPTER XVIII.

I HAVE never at any time, although I certainly once thought so, really belonged to the ranks of those who take up the line of despising and looking down upon the whole sex of womankind. I have gone through the whole process of railing at women, I must confess: but most men do that more or less when they are too young to know anything about the matter, and seldom continue to do so when they have once had the good fortune to discover that good women do exist outside the circle of their own homes. Whenever I hear a man past thirty continuing to talk of women in general like a boy of twenty, I always set him down either for an affected block-head, or for an unfortunate fellow who has seen only the very worst side of the world, if he has seen any side of it at all, or else for a human hog who is unable to distinguish between pearls and acorns, and so tramples both indiscriminately under foot. But

certainly once in my life it was my fate to feel, in all honesty and sincerity, a disgust for the whole feminine portion of the world, represented as it was to me by her whom I had followed from Paris, and to whose service I had devoted myself, but who now as utterly threw me aside as if I had never been so much to her as a lackey would have been, as soon as love came to her in the guise in which Jupiter came to Danaë. Indeed, to what cause was it possible to ascribe her conduct but to the most contemptible of all? Mr Lester might certainly be the very paragon of all that was noble and attractive: of this I knew nothing. But he was certainly as rich as I was poor, and this I did know. My grand passion had come to a most untimely and unromantic end, and the prophecy of my Mephistophelean Mentor seemed likely to be fulfilled to the very letter.

Throughout my conversation with Marie, I believe that I succeeded in keeping myself tolerably calm. But when I left her, I felt as though I were drunk with wine: I scarcely saw where I was going: I had no control over my voice — no command over my steps. I have a dim recollection of meeting both Prosper and Barton on my way, but of what I said to them or they to me, I have no recollection whatever. They certainly must have thought me drunk. No

doubt all this sounds sufficiently ridiculous : and, no doubt, I ought by rights to have been well prepared for what I had just heard. My dismissal, practically, had taken place weeks ago—perhaps more. But when a gambler has staked his whole fortune upon the cast of a single die, he must be excused for losing his senses a little when he has lost the throw. “*Semel insanivimus omnes* :” and we are not to be blamed for that, but for being mad more than *semel*.

Poor Dick Barton was no longer living with me. We had not quarrelled—far from it : for I believe that he, for some strange reason or other, bore me a real affection, and I too—why, it is quite impossible to say—know that I bore one for him. Poverty, at all events, has this one merit, that it teaches us to know the good and ill of each other marvellously soon, and to love the one and not to judge harshly of the other, whatever it may be : at least such has been my own experience. Besides, I will say for Barton that he never showed any but his good side where I was concerned. I was certainly very far indeed from being able to appreciate his learning and special kind of talent, or to admire his manner of using the one or the other : but there was at the bottom of the man's character so much true goodness of nature, and such a perfect scorn of everything that was mean and base,

from which he did not exempt his own many faults and weaknesses, and he was so completely open and unreserved in thought and speech — better had it been for himself had he been otherwise—that I could not but accept him for what he might have been, rather than for what he actually was. But why am I so ungrateful as to attempt to make mere excuses for him? I care not what others may say or think. I am quite willing to admit that he had the errors and weaknesses of other men multiplied by a thousand: but, for myself, I have too much cause not to think of him with something more than ordinary affection, and to judge him by a higher standard than the judgment of men. “I was sick, and ye visited me: verily I say unto you, Inasmuch as ye have done it unto one of the least of these my brethren, ye have done it unto me.”

The bitterness of my disappointment, coming as it did upon the hard and uncongenial work, the mental anxiety, the want of bodily nourishment, and all the various wretchedness, unlightened by hope or buoyancy of heart, which had been my portion for so long, had its natural effect upon me. I was nervous and excitable at the best of times. I was much given to brooding over myself, and a life of which music is the centre is not one to render any man's nature

more calm. One of three things was inevitable. There are some men who in my position would have committed murder: there are many who would have committed suicide. I take no credit to myself that I did neither: for before my thoughts had time to direct themselves into any decided channel, I found myself prostrate with brain fever.

Throughout its course, as I lay in my miserable garret, I was tended by Dick Barton: and I will undertake to say that the man has never lived—no, nor the woman either—who, under any circumstances, has proved a better and more self-denying nurse than he then proved to me. I know that I have never since been a thoroughly good believer in the necessary superiority of a woman over a man in a sick-room. There is a pathos in the tenderness of a rough hand, in the gentleness of a loud voice, in the subdued sound of a heavy tread, in the conscious restraint of a self-indulgent nature, that is wanting to the naturally self-denying nature, to the velvet footfall, to the sweet voice, and to the soft hand, which are light and gentle and tender just because they cannot help being so. There is something also that is bracing and tonic in the free sympathy of a comrade, while the ceaseless attention of a woman is always more or less enervating: and as real sickness

makes women of us all, we, like them, feel the advantage of being supported by stronger hands than theirs. And then, too, one can swear at a man and tell him plainly when he worries one: his dress does not rustle, he does not speak in whispers, and he understands that when one is ill one wants to be left alone as much as possible. All this is rank heresy, I know: but I am not ashamed to confess myself a heretic, if only for Dick Barton's sake.

How he contrived to support us both during this time, I never wholly knew: indeed I afterwards took care not to make too minute inquiries. Prosper was generous to me—more, I think, than he would have been to most men where money was concerned: but any amount of generosity on his part would not have accounted for all, nor could we have lived entirely upon occasional loans of half-crowns. I certainly have dim recollections of seeing Barton as he sat up with me night after night, writing at a furious pace, always with a pencil, in order that I might not be worried with the scratching of a pen: and I hope that that also may have accounted to some extent for our having escaped starvation. Nor do I believe that during these weeks of watching he ever lapsed into his usual habits—indeed I heard afterwards, from our landlady, that he had never

returned from any of his expeditions from home otherwise than sober, and that nothing in the shape of liquor had once entered the house. It may seem but little to say in praise of a man's devotion to one's self that for a few weeks he managed to keep sober, and to work hard: but in his case it can be called nothing short of heroism. I doubt if in the course of his whole life he had ever before both worked hard and kept sober for two consecutive days. It was not till I was entirely out of danger that Dick Barton one evening brought in two bottles of brandy, drank them both in one short sitting, and then went off to sleep before the fireplace for twenty-four hours: and it was thus that I knew I was well.

How like a dream everything now appeared! When I first woke again to my bare and empty world, it cost me all the effort of which, in my weak condition, I was capable, to comprehend where I was—and almost to comprehend who I was. It would have seemed most natural to me to find myself in my bed at Pré-aux-Fleurs, under the care of Aunt Cathon or Mère Suzanne: and for a moment I really thought so, for I had been delirious, and my brain was still confused. Nor, when I was once more able to realise all that had happened, did reality seem less unreal than fancy itself. It seemed to me that I had been

dreaming all my days, and that my delirium had been only that confused portion of a dream that immediately precedes waking. With respect to my whole life, I had to make the same effort to recover my recollection that one makes when endeavouring to recall some vanished vision of the night that has left an unusually vivid impression. I made the effort quite calmly, for I was left far too weak in body to suffer in mind. Strange to say, of all the images that rose before me, one by one, and that once more came back into being, the last was that of Angélique Lefort—or, as I should now say, of Angélique Lester. It seemed as if that which had been buried in my heart the most deeply of all had taken the longest time to emerge from it into the upper light. But I am wrong. One image came later still, which came out of the darkness with all the modest gentleness of her whom it represented—as though, like herself, it had preferred to take the lowest room. But when at last it did come, every word, every touch, which had passed between myself and her, became a living thing, standing out from the shadow in strong relief—something real to hold by, something to believe in as true, if all the world should prove but a dream. If the sight of Dick Barton had proved to me that my illness was over, it was the thought of Marie

that proved to me that I was still alive—that I had not passed wholly into the land of shadows for ever. And not only so, but, direct my thoughts whithersoever I would, they still settled back upon the consoling words, and upon the voice that had spoken them, and upon the true eyes that had given them the force of life, and not upon the words of a love that must now be crushed at any cost, and from which some instinct seemed to make my memory recoil. It may be that the brain, in its strife to recover strength, threw off, by a healthy effort of nature, all that might hinder its success, and turned to what must needs render its recovery at once more rapid and more sure.

I was not allowed to talk much for some days, in the course of which I had ample time to gather myself together; and it was not long before I came to the conclusion that this tendency of my thoughts was not the result of recollection merely, but had been brought about in some measure also by an occasional presence that had mingled itself with the dreams of my fever. Barton would not talk to me upon this subject, however much I sought to question him: but I felt very certain that my very earthly nurse had been aided by an occasional angelic visitation.

My recovery was not slow, for I could not afford to be ill, far less to enjoy the luxury of a long and gradual convalescence, seeing that before all things I had to relieve Dick Barton from his burden as soon as I could possibly manage to do so. Still, even so, getting well was most certainly hard enough.

Almost as soon as I could contrive to crawl out of doors I paid a visit to Marie Lefort, and I thought her also looking ill and anxious. She had little news to tell me, except that Angélique, whom she had of late seen but seldom, was well, and, she hoped, happy, in spite of increasing difficulties: but she did not seem over-willing to speak of the subject. Of herself she had much more to say: and that subject was a far more pleasant one to either of us. She seemed at once, and apparently without an effort, to have made a really great success, in the best sense of the word—to have made the success that I had been supposed to be struggling for all my days, and that hundreds of far greater merit than mine are constantly struggling for and seldom succeed in obtaining. All who remember the musical history of that day will also remember the name of Marie Lefort, while I do not flatter myself that one will call to mind that of Félix Créville. And yet, to pursue the comparison between us, on my side had

been ambition, long and early familiarity with the profession and its ways, the most careful and elaborate training, and a natural aptitude for my art—which I do not confound with my profession: while she was most certainly devoid of the least particle of personal ambition—she had had no regular training, and had known nothing of her profession until she, almost from the very moment she appeared, had come to stand confessedly at its head.

Certainly the ways of genius are inscrutable: and in our own art—I no longer call it a profession where genius is in question—certainly not less inscrutable than they are in others. The praise and blame of critics may indeed kill mere merit, and often do kill it: but what is royal by right of nature they cannot dethrone so long as it remains true to itself, for it is then proof alike against praise and blame. And this girl was as unconsciously true to herself as she was to all the world: and none the less so for being a true woman as well as a true artist, and for being no less good than true. I began by saying that I believed in good women: but I very much doubt if I should have been able to say so had I not met with her. It was as likely as not that after the destruction of my faith I should never

4

have sought to change my opinion: and if a man seeks only for what is bad, he is tolerably sure to find what he seeks, and that only. I cannot sufficiently rejoice that the good came to me without my seeking for it, as indeed is generally the case with good things of every kind. I also, like most men, have found out that the great instrument of Providence is accident, and am almost inclined to hold, by way of consequence, that the less we attempt to control accident the better for our good fortune.

It was from her that I learned fully of Barton's devotion to me; and she, with her faculty for seeing at a glance the best of every one, was as full of his praise as her story made me become. Moreover, she had found him—a thing incredible to all who knew anything of the man—as considerate of her in every way as if she had been a queen and he one of her court. But for this I did not give him too much credit, for I did not then believe that there was a man living who, when with her, would not catch from her something of her own gentleness: and I do not believe it now, save in respect of one man out of all the world—and that man was certainly not Dick Barton.

While I was with her, there entered a gentleman

to whom I was introduced as Mr Warden, and whom I remembered to have seen at Miss Raymond's house on the evening when Angélique Lefort first appeared before an audience. I was sorry to have our talk interrupted, and, after a minute or two, left her: nor did she press me to stay. On my return to my lodging, which had again become Dick Barton's also, he gave me a scolding for having escaped from my confinement without leave, and added,—

“But I suppose you have been to return ‘thanks for kind inquiries.’ There were plenty of them certainly in that quarter, if you care to know. I know if I were that infernal hypocritical humbug I should begin to be jealous: and I hope he is. But the prig is sure to make his way in this paradise of prigs called the world: and it would pay an interesting sort of fellow like you to help to ease him of some of his plunder. Men like that always get rich, sooner or later. It is honest men like you and me that grow lean: but still—well, unlucky devil as I am, I’m glad I’m not even as this Pharisee.”

“Who in the world are you talking of?”

“Who? Why, Mark Warden; *Cram* Warden—Mark read backwards, you know—as he used to be called at Mag’s in my time.”

"Warden? I was introduced to a Mr Warden this very morning by Miss Lefort."

"The devil you were! Do you mean to say you never met him there before?"

"Never."

"Nor heard of him?"

"No."

"Oh, that's her game, is it?"

"What on earth do you mean?"

"Warden's getting tired of her—shouldn't wonder. If I were you, I'd just look out a little. You're just the fellow to go over head and ears. And it seems to be a family that has an uncommonly good notion of looking after itself. Young Lester wasn't a bad catch; and Warden won't prove himself much worse a one in the long-run, if she can hold him, unless I'm confoundedly mistaken. And if the worst should come to the worst with her, you see, she'll have two strings to her bow. You'll do to make an honest woman of her, if she wants to take to that line."

This was Monsieur Prosper over again, only a great deal worse.

"And of whom are you speaking now?"

"Why, of Miss Lefort and Warden's — :—which is rhyme and reason, and alliteration into the bargain. Ah, he thinks that because a man sleeps with his

eyes he must be asleep with his ears too. He let the cat out splendidly! It's true he said she was married: but I will say for the prig that he isn't quite such a fool as that comes to. Of course he may keep a hundred women for what I care, but——"

What he was going to add I know not. "Then whoever told you so lied," I interrupted him. "And if——"

"No one told it me, and so no one lied. And so don't make a fool of yourself, unless you are particularly bent on wearing Cram Warden's worn-out clothes."

This was too much to bear, even from him. What at the moment was all that he had done for me compared with this insult to her?

"Then I tell you——" I began.

"That it is I who lie, I suppose?" he replied, carelessly. "Well, tell me so, and welcome. I don't pretend to be afraid of vowels, and for liquids in general I have rather a liking. So I won't even throw this bottle at your head—unless, indeed, you'll wait till it's empty. It would be a waste of good liquor. But if you are in a great hurry, you had better help me to finish it."

What was to be done with such a man as this?

I only know that I acted like an idiot: and yet, perhaps, as many a wise man would have acted in my place, even though he were not just recovering from brain fever. I just went to the table, took the bottle of brandy, and sent it flying through the window.

Things had come to such a pass with him that to deprive him of brandy, when he had once got hold of it, was like depriving a tiger of its food: and scarcely less courage was required on the part of him who should make the attempt than if he had been a real tiger.

Never shall I forget the angry glare that came into his eyes. For a moment I thought that he was going to send me flying after it; and he could have done so with the greatest ease. But he only, without a word, strode across the room, burst open with his foot our apology for a door, slammed its remains violently behind him, and in another instant was out of the house, the door of which, to judge by the sound that reached my ears, he treated in the same manner as he had treated our own.

CHAPTER XIX.

"So that is the Monsieur Créville, is it, of whom I have heard Miss Raymond speak?" asked Warden, when Félix had left the room.

He looked sharply at her as he spoke: but she showed no sign of the confusion that he expected, if not hoped, to see, for the simple reason that she had none to show.

"Yes, that is Félix Créville, poor fellow!"

"He is a great friend of yours, I hear?"

"Yes, indeed, a very great friend—and one, too, whom we have nearly been losing. I wish he had not come out to-day—he looks terribly weak still."

"And you, too, are not looking well, Marie."

"Am I not? Then my looks belie me, I assure you. I am quite well. But I get so troubled sometimes with thinking about Angélique, and I miss the children now they are at school. I seem to have no one to live for but myself."

Mark Warden did not observe that he was omitted from the list of those for whom she might be supposed to be living. "Marie," he said, gravely and rather suddenly, "I fear that I have been doing you a very great injury."

"Done me?"

"Yes. I have been thinking much about you of late: I have been thinking how in my selfishness I have done my best to spoil your whole life for you, and have been fearing that I must have succeeded only too well."

"Why, Mark—what can you mean?"

"What right had I to take you from your home—to condemn you to this life of solitude of which you complain so justly—to place you in this false position——"

"Mark!"

"Have you not a right to complain of me? I——"

"Not the least—not the least in the world! There—will that satisfy you? And if you ever talk so absurdly again——"

In spite of her assurances to the contrary, she was indeed looking pale and worn: but to him, however unsuccessfully, she always strove to be the Marie of old times.

"My dear Marie," he went on, with his eyes fixed upon the ground, "your conduct has been wonderful—admirable. You have been only too good—far more good than I have deserved."

Something in his manner puzzled her, and she looked up inquiringly.

"Oh, Mark!" she exclaimed suddenly, with hope in her eyes and in her voice, "do you mean that our separation is to end—that we are now to be together always? Oh, you need not be afraid that I cannot bear good news! Is it so indeed?"

They were sitting side by side, and now she took one of his hands in both of hers, and looked up into his face with bright eyes and parted lips. He was moved for an instant—how could he help it?—by her excitement: but it was for an instant only. No—it could not be. Hugh or Félix might have yielded to this display of pure emotion, as unselfish in its source and in its nature as any human emotion can ever be, but not Warden. Is it possible that it was this very coldness of his that gave him his power, according to the theory that in all affairs of the heart it is only one of the two who loves while the other only submits to be loved, and that it is the passive nature that rules? Let such a heresy be anathema of course: but there can at all events be no doubt

that a sympathetic heart is to a man what his left heel was to Achilles.

He did not, however, make any attempt to disengage his hand from hers. He even returned the caress, although coldly and sadly. What he had to say must needs be said: but he began to see that the saying of it would turn out to be far more difficult than he had imagined. Imagination was neither his *forte* nor his foible: and having once in his own mind overcome the practical difficulty of the situation to his own satisfaction, he had not wasted his resolution and his energy by mentally dwelling upon the probable details of the scene that he assumed to be inevitable. And this reserve of energy is also a secret of power.

Thus they sat in silence for more than a second: and under such circumstances a second is a very long time indeed. She was waiting for the confirmation of her hope—he was thinking how he should put things least unpleasantly, so that the coming scene might be rendered as mild as possible. It was not that he was afraid of scenes as such, of whatever nature they might be: but it was essential to his purpose that matters should go off quietly,—that she should fall in with his views naturally, and that, above all, she should understand them *à demi mot*.

"Are you then so anxious?" he asked. The question was ambiguous: but the tone in which it was asked made its meaning only too clear, even to her.

She did not, however, relax her grasp of his hand: on the contrary, she only pressed it the more closely still. Her eyes saddened and moistened, but she did not lower them. She only said, very gently,—

"Please, Mark, forgive me. Indeed I did not mean to complain."

"I know that—but——"

"Oh, Mark!" she said, suddenly, as though the mouse had found a spirit at last, "why should we not get rid of all waiting at once, and do as other people do?"

"No, Marie; I will not add to my offence towards you. I——"

"Your offence? Did I not say——"

"Well, to my thoughtlessness then: and that is surely an offence. I will not treat you as—as Lester has used your cousin. I will not condemn you to a life of poverty now, after having contrived to save you from it so long."

"Do you think, then, that I should fear poverty? Do you think that I have waited because I preferred waiting? And—and do you

think that I would have spoken as I have if there had been still reason to wait any longer?"

"Still reason! Have you forgotten my Fellowship?"

"Oh, give it up at once! What is it, after all, that it should keep coming between us for ever? Supposing you had not got it, we should have been married just the same: and we should have had to do without it altogether."

"Yes—and have starved. I doubt if I could even have become a country curate, with a Catholic wife."

"And supposing you were to lose your Fellowship now—how I hate the word!—what should you have to do?"

"My dear child, how can you ask such a question? What is Lester doing, for instance?"

"And supposing we could do without it?"

"Yes—suppose the skies were to fall!"

"Well—suppose they have fallen! Can you guess how much money I have made within the last two months?"

"How much?"

"A hundred and forty pounds!"

"What! by playing the piano? Is it possible?"

"So it seems. But I thought I should surprise you when you came to find out that your poor stupid

Marie could do something after all. I am sure you could not be more surprised than she was herself! And now, have not the skies fallen?"

Certainly Warden was astonished. "But do you mean to say that you are likely to earn so much money always?"

"I hope so—if I work hard. People need never go backward, Monsieur Prosper says. And at all events I might—I am sure I could—last for a few years, till you become all that you want to be."

She had certainly cut the ground of the Fellowship from under his feet. But he was by no means driven into a corner.

"But, Marie, do you know what it is you are asking me?"

"Certainly I know: to go on reading for the bar—to go into Parliament—to do all you can in the world—and to let my piano take the place of your Fellowship."

"How I wish it were possible!"

"And why should it not be?"

"Because it is quite out of the question for any one who has any self-respect to live upon his wife." To do him justice, without giving him credit for the fine feeling that he claimed, such a proceeding would honestly have been gall and wormwood to a man of

his energy and self-reliance. But Marie did not see it in that light: and this time it was for her to be astonished. He did not, however, give her time to reply, but, making the most of his point, went on quickly,

"Do you think that I, for five or six or even seven years to come, could submit to be kept in that way—to become one of the contemptible race of artists' husbands? No—that is one of the things that I would not do, even if I could—even if it were possible."

"What! is it not right for a man to be helped by his own wife?"

The words were spoken in all simplicity: but he fancied that they rang a little contemptuously. He was wrong: but his fancy was not altogether without ground.

"You do not understand," he answered; "women never do. It is a question of honour, you see——"

"*Mon Dieu!*"—she often reverted to French exclamations when excited, as, of late, had not seldom been the case—" *Mon Dieu!* I certainly do not understand that I should go on making money for us both and for the children as well, and to help Angélique too, perhaps, and that you should be the only one not to be allowed to gain anything by it! I am sure that I would take any quantity of money from you."

"But that is different. The husband is bound to support his wife—and it is bad enough of me to be doing nothing for you. But if, instead of merely doing nothing, I were to rob you, to rob the children, to rob Angélique—that would be a disgrace: and that I will not incur."

But still he had not perceptibly advanced very far with what he really wanted to say: and he felt in the position of a chess-player who has managed to lose none of his pieces without an exchange, but who has not yet succeeded in obtaining the attack. Nevertheless, though he had heard much that might well have given him an excuse for declaring the game drawn and yielding to destiny, he was determined to pursue it to the end. A man who has become fairly intoxicated with some Earl's Dene is not so easily to be sobered. It is true that one wife making money at the rate of eight hundred a-year was actually in his hand: but the wife in the bush was worth a great deal more than two of her. No one would deny, in spite of the proverb, that even one plump pheasant, not to speak of two, though still in the bush, is more than worth a sparrow, though the latter may be actually in the grasp. To take Marie, even supposing that her present success was to continue, was to give up more than the chance of becoming master of Earl's

Dene. It would be to forfeit Miss Clare's favour and his prospect of his seat in Parliament, and to be thrown back once more upon the slow path of the bar. Not only so, but all the trouble that he had taken to bring about Hugh's marriage with Angélique would have been altogether thrown away: and although he was not in the least dissatisfied with his proceedings in that matter so far, still, if what he had done should prove useless, he would be obliged consciously to recognise the fact that he had not been actuated by a spirit of the highest honour. If he were to make up his mind to let bygones be bygones and to take Marie, it would have been better, not only for the sake of his self-respect, but of his self-interest also, to have kept his friend Hugh in a position in which he might have been made available as a patron. No—he had certainly committed himself too far to a line of conduct to draw back now in such a manner as to secure either satisfaction or profit.

And then he thought of Alice Raymond herself, and persuaded himself that he was really in love with her, simply as a man with a woman, and that Marie was an obstacle in the way not only of interest but of love also. For conscience, when, as usual, it finds itself powerless to warn and restrain, invariably

goes over to the enemy, and betakes itself to the pleasanter task of excusing and justifying.

"Well," he thought to himself, "why should I hesitate? She is not my wife in any true sense—she is not even so much as my mistress. How any man who is used to this kind of thing would laugh at me!—Marie," he said, rising suddenly from his seat beside her, "I have been thinking a great deal lately, and blaming myself terribly. It is time all this should end. You have now made a career for yourself without me, and have made your own circle of friends. I can do nothing for you. I have been far from being your friend: and I will not, having thus left you to struggle alone, take advantage of your success. That is quite out of the question. It is not that I care for the opinion of the world: but I will not submit to be obliged to despise myself, and not only so, but to feel that I ought to be despised by you. Your offer to me just now was a cruel kindness. No, Marie—our roads in life—which never lay together—have now diverged wholly. It is no use now to think of what might have been: I must now—for it is the only thing in my power to do for you—set you free. We shall still be friends—we never could, under such circumstances as ours, have been more."

Had Marie's experience of the world been such as by this time it no doubt ought to have been, she would—as he hoped she would—have caught his drift at once, and have seen that all his periphrasis was but meant to sweeten the draught that sooner or later she would have to take, whether she chose or no. But to her it seemed only that he was influenced by generous self-denial and excessive scrupulousness. Yet even so his want of warmth puzzled her and made her afraid.

“Mark,” she said, with a decision of voice and manner that had never appeared in her before, and with all her earnestness in her face, “I too have of late been thinking much about ourselves: and I, like you, have felt that things can be no longer as they are. Do you think I cannot—yes, in fifty ways—help you, and not by making money alone? That is not everything I mean by help. I would wait still more long and patiently than I have waited, and be still content. But, Mark, I try so hard to do and think all that is right by you and by myself: and then, you know how very seldom now we ever meet—how very little yet we have ever been to one another—we, who ought to be all to each other always!” She looked up at him timidly and questioningly, as though she too wished, if it were pos-

sible, to be understood *à demi mot*—as though she had much to say that she would rather not seek to put in words.

“Oh, you cannot know the nature of my life,” she went on; “how very lonely I am in all this whirl—how this new life to me who have lived in silence all my days is almost more than I can bear. We all need some support or other: and I have none on which to lean with safety. Do you know sometimes I fear myself?”

“Fear yourself?”

“I cannot tell all that I mean: but I am sure of this, that, if we do not come together now, we never shall. The world is coming between us: and you are drifting from me, Mark, farther and farther.”

“And you from me. Is not that what I said just now?”

“No—not I from you. All that I ask of you is to be allowed to be with you and to help you in your life, and to be helped in mine—for that is now what I would say before all other things. I will try to make up to you for all you lose and more, in every way—even in money: and you will save me from myself.”

“Really, Marie, I do not understand you in the

least. You speak as though you were in some mysterious danger."

"I mean, a wife should have no friend before her husband."

Mark looked at her quickly—he thought he began to see her drift, and congratulated himself on having proved himself a true prophet. "Monsieur Créville, for instance," he thought to himself: but of course did not say so.

"Is not that also what I was saying to you?" he asked. "Yes—it is quite true that our lives have wholly diverged, and can never be the same again."

"But they can—indeed they can, believe me! We can still be all to each other, as we hoped for once, and as we ought to be and can be now. If it is only for my sake you wish me still to wait, indeed there is no need. It is for my sake that I ask you now to wait no longer."

"And, Marie, once more I tell you, for your own sake, that it cannot be. Only think for a moment. I must wait five years yet before I am entitled to hold a brief: and as I mean not only to get a great many briefs but to be able to make the most of them when I get them, I must devote those five years exclusively to preparation. I know that some men go into the profession upon nothing but the light of

nature, and that some of them succeed nevertheless : but that is not my way. I shall not only put myself in the way of success : I shall make myself sure of it, as any man may if he goes the right way to work. Thus, meanwhile, I shall not be able to earn a penny : and if I get into Parliament, I shall have no more pennies than I shall be obliged to spend. And live upon you I will not—I say that once for all. And so I must keep my Fellowship. We could not, in any case, look forward to coming together within ten years at the least, unless we agree to ruin each other—and I will not be the one to ruin you, at any rate.”

“And do you think that I—oh Mark ! you are by far the wiser : but I know that I am right in this. Ruin each other ? No—but help each other ! and it will be too late. I did not think so once : but now I fear myself—fear everything.”

“Too late ? Yes : I fear it not only will be, but is, too late.”

“Mark, are you hiding anything from me ? Are you afraid to tell me what you think I cannot bear ?”

“Not the least—that is—no, Marie, I have nothing to tell you. You must not think I have been speaking selfishly——”

“Oh, I am sure of that !”

“And I heartily wish things were different. But

it is time for this farce to be over. I am not your husband, you are not my wife, in any true sense. We have no children: the world knows nothing of our relation to each other, and is not likely to inquire. Let us then act as though this foolish business had never had a beginning—let me set you free once more. Do not force me to do you an injustice.”

“You mean that we should still keep living on as we are now? Well—if it must be so—but it is hard to bear.”

“No, Marie, not as we are living now. Let us consider that instead of being married we are only engaged. We have only been through an arbitrary ceremony after all: and should such an empty form fetter us? If we still remain in the same mind years hence—if nothing should happen to part us still more—we will marry in the face of the world: but if among your new friends—as you probably will—you should find some one you prefer to me, I will not interfere. Your happiness is all I desire: and I will do nothing to hinder it.”

Let us for once call things by their right names. This atrocious idea had seemed very plausible and easy to him while he had been evolving it, and he had almost entirely persuaded himself that Marie would be glad to see it in the same light as himself.

And so far he was right, that her entire trust in him, and her innocence, which was scarcely even yet beginning to transform itself into the higher purity that comes of experience, concealed the true nature of his proposal under a mist of apparent self-sacrifice. But, at the same time, it need not be said that though he was right, after a fashion, to this very limited extent, it was simply impossible that he could be right any farther, unless she had been idiotic instead of innocent, or else utterly depraved. She would have refused to understand him even had she been able: and, as it was, she could only look amazed.

"That we should marry again?" she asked.

"I mean that we must be content to look forward to that as a possibility. For the present we can be nothing to each other: and why should we thus be careful to suffer all the disadvantages of our position without having any of the benefit of it? No—it is too absurd, too childish a farce. It is that, and nothing more, for two rational beings to make themselves slaves to a mere form, of the existence of which no mortal soul need know."

He did not see that her silence and calmness arose from utter astonishment: and her way of taking what he had said encouraged him to think that he should avoid a scene after all.

"We shall always be friends," he continued, with greater ease, and in a tone of confidence that astonished and mystified her still more. Certainly, if she seemed to him to be taking the matter very comfortably, he also seemed to her to be taking it with a coolness that was extraordinary indeed.

"Friends?" she again asked, still more bewildered.

"Of course," he said. "And now, for the present, we must forget our folly. You will find far better friends than I: but I shall still be one. You have behaved admirably——"

"What!" she exclaimed suddenly. "You seem to think I understand you: but indeed I do not—not a word."

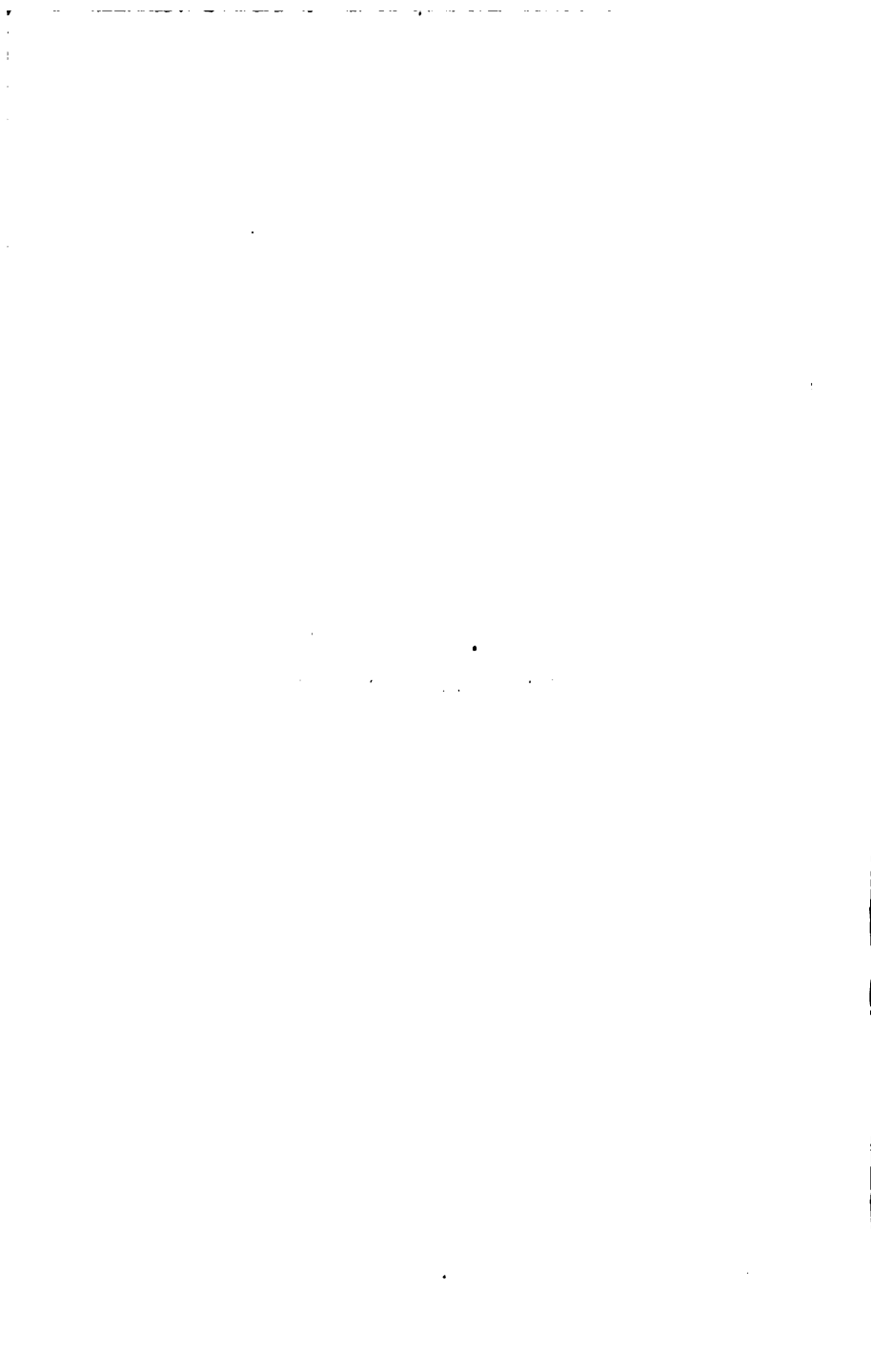
Her bewilderment was too clear to be mistaken. He saw to his mortification that all his words had been thrown away, and that he should have to go over the whole ground again. What in the world was he to do with a woman who could not understand that he wanted to get rid of her?

It was useless to go over the whole ground again. In fact there was really nothing left to him to say—unless indeed he should say in so many words: "I very much want to commit bigamy: in compensation, I give you full leave either to follow my example, or to content yourself with breaking the

seventh commandment as much as you please: and there will be no harm in the arrangement, because no one will know of it." But, as he could not say this, the utmost he could do was to repress her petition to put an end to their separation.

It may be a source of wonder to some that, together with the petition, he had not succeeded in destroying effectually the desire from which the petition had sprung. But there was that in her heart, though she did not know its nature, which really alarmed her, and which made her, in spite of the barrier—or perhaps because of it—which had now for so long been growing up between her and him, feel far more deeply than she had been able to express, a sort of desperate longing to throw herself upon her husband's strength for protection from herself and from her own heart. As he had himself suggested, she was indeed in a mysterious danger: and the only way of escape from it was that which he himself had sought to close.

BOOK III.—MOTHER AND SON



CHAPTER I.

MEANWHILE, during the time that these complications were proceeding—while Angélique was incessantly devoting her long days and short nights to the half-weary, half-eager consideration of how she should contrive to turn the tables upon her apparently successful opponent, and while the latter was striving to make sure of the grapes that were hanging so provokingly just beyond his reach—there was one of whom no one appeared to think much, and who was ignorant of the plots and counterplots that were centred round her, but who, nevertheless, felt the influence of them most of all.

Assuredly it was grievous to Hugh Lester to have been deprived of his inheritance in what had to all appearance been so unkind a manner: it was bitter enough, and more than enough, to Angélique to have had to put up with the apples of the Dead Sea instead of with the fruit of Earl's Dene: and it was well-

nigh maddening to her rival to have to play the part of the fox in the fable, more especially as he did not seek to persuade himself that the grapes were sour. But more grievous than the loss of an inheritance, more grievous even than unkindness itself, more bitter than Dead Sea apples, more maddening than grapes out of reach, was to Miss Clare the irreconcilable breach that had been brought about, with but very little real fault on either side, between herself and him to whom she clung as a mother to an only son. That neither, considering their natures, had been much to blame, only made matters worse: for where there is no fault, there can scarcely ever be reconciliation.

It was not only that a wound dealt through the sensitive and easily-pierced armour of affection is by its very nature far less easy to heal than the worst that can be dealt in any other way, but that her own nature, almost hidden as it was under a wellnigh impenetrable panoply of her own manufacture, was more intense a hundredfold than that of all the others put together: and not only was it more intense, but, when once reached, more sensitive also. With her, a feeling never remained under the form of a mere barren impulse: and it needed almost the direct interposition of some *Deus ex machinâ* to

make her change a resolution when she had once formed it. But this morbid intensity of hers necessarily acted two ways. In the case of Hugh, it prevented her from even so much as dreaming of going back from the course that she had deliberately adopted: but, at the same time, it rendered that course inexpressibly hard for her to bear. To have had to lose her adopted son by reason of his own act of folly, as it appeared to her, was in all conscience bad enough: but it was infinitely worse that the death-warrant of their relation to one another should have been signed and issued by her own hand. But, having once been issued, it was just as irrevocable by her or by any one else as if the issuing of it had been a matter of pleasure instead of the bitterest pain. And, indeed, there must in such cases be mingled with the pain, however bitter it may be, a certain amount of savage satisfaction, or it would be simply and utterly impossible that they should ever occur. It is only to be hoped that the spirit which leads people to sacrifice their own affections and their own hearts for the sake of punishing others, bears with it some sort of consolation: for, in spite of its cruelty, it is not altogether evil, seeing that it is the spirit of self-sacrifice after all.

It was in a very different spirit from that in which she had looked forward to the last general election that she now approached the time when she would be called upon to supply a member for Denethorp to take the place of Hugh. Then she had been supported by a sense of gratified pride: now, only by the severest sense of duty. There was not the least difficulty in her selection of a candidate, seeing that she had one ready to her hand who would probably beat back Prescott from the field as he had beaten him from it before, and who would do credit to his patroness both on the hustings and in the House. But of course she could not take the personal interest in him that she had taken in Hugh: and beyond supporting him with her interest—which, by the way, had been a little shaken by the events of the late contest—and supplying him with funds to carry on the battle, she could do, and did, but little.

Her agent shook his head terribly when he heard that there was to be a fresh contest so closely upon the heels of the old. An estate, however good it may be, must require a space of rest wherein to recover itself after such a fight as the last had been: and he earnestly proposed to Miss Clare that she and he between them should look out for a candi-

date with some capacity for sharing the expense. But she would not hear of such a thing for a moment.

"Mr Warden has fairly earned his claim," she said. "And if the last tree had to go, we must share Denethorp with no one. As long as I live I will put in whom I please."

Besides, the bleeding of Earl's Dene, even though it should be to death, was not of so very much moment now. If she could but leave life with honour, unbeaten, and with her duty done to the last, she would be only too glad to leave her throne altogether to her new heiress, and to retire to some Yuste where she might wait for the end. Indeed she cared but little into whose hands the sceptre might fall when she herself was gone, since it must needs be lost to her own blood. Like another sovereign, she also was inclined to say, "*Après moi le Déluge*": in no careless or selfish spirit, but in the sense that she, so long as she lived, would endeavour to the utmost of her power to stay the flood, however inevitable it might be.

She was quite alone now, and worse than alone. During her occupation of it, Earl's Dene had been anything but a lively place, and now it was almost as though it had once more resumed its ancient

religious character, and was inhabited by a solitary abbess without nuns. The servants ought to have had a pleasant and easy time of it, seeing that they had simply nothing to do: but, with the perversity of idle human nature, they were already beginning to find their places insupportable, and to form a large but useless opposition in favour of the young squire.

Their mistress had, in fact, no occupation left but to sit by herself all day long and remember:—that greatest of all the curses, when it is not the greatest of all the blessings, that belong to age. And, as is always the case, it was those days which were farthest away from her that filled the largest and clearest place in her memory. Youth, while present, is so much like a dream that it can scarcely be said to live, until it is past: and her own youth, exceptionally dream-like as it had been, had also been of a nature that rendered it impossible to forget.

It can scarcely be a matter of wonder, however morbid, in one sense, her feelings in this respect had become, that she referred her last great sorrow to what she, in the strict spirit of judgment that she always brought to bear upon all that concerned her, considered to have been her great and many sins of

disobedience and rebellion. She had been stung in the very part wherein she had offended : and even though she had spent a lifetime of repentance, she was unable to doubt the justice of what had been laid upon her to bear. It seemed to her that even as she had, according to her exaggerated view of the matter, proved a curse to her own father, so she was condemned to suffer in like manner through her own child, who had torn himself from her in a way that of all ways was calculated to wound her most deeply. The morbid consciousness of having sinned, which is always strong in proportion to the slightness of its foundation, caused her to look upon the whole of her subsequent life as an unending penance, to which the peace that she had enjoyed of late years had only lent an additional sting. And yet, although she looked upon Hugh as in this respect an instrument in the hands of Providence, she did not any the more hold him excused. If she judged herself hardly, she judged others more hardly still. Indeed, it was not so much the offence against herself that she was unable to pardon, as the offence that, in her eyes, he had committed against the traditions of his rank and family, and against what was becoming and honourable.

In the case of any ordinary woman, of a weaker

mind and less intense nature, one of two results would have been inevitable. She must either have accepted her situation, and have sought to escape from herself by entering upon that poor imitation of the narrow way that is open to the proud and unforgiving, and by spending the rest of her days, according to her light, either in the practice of pious austerities or in listening to the longest sermons she could find; or else she must, on the other hand, have rebelled against Providence and against destiny, and have gone mad. But Miss Clare was not by nature of a pious temperament: nor was this defect in her character, as most people will consider it, supplied artificially by those tender memories and associations of childhood and early youth in which faith is so often born. It is of course true that natures such as hers, which in youth are the most irresistibly attracted by the barren charms of sentimental scepticism, are precisely those which are the most apt in maturer life to bear fruit in the shape of some extreme form of faith, seeing that between emotional belief and emotional unbelief there is scarcely a pin to choose: but when faith follows scepticism, it will almost invariably be found that it has preceded it also. Besides, had she been capable of undergoing this pseudo-conversion, she would have been unable

to find any outlet by which it might be satisfied. The Church of St Peter, which provides every sort of disposition with an outlet adapted to it, was to her nothing more than a name, and a disagreeable name : for Methodists and Ranters, as she would have collectively termed all sects of Protestant Dissenters, she entertained the contempt of a great lady and the hatred of a high Tory : while the steady-going Church of England of those days was certainly not, as she knew it, of an emotional character. Nor, on the other hand, was she in the least likely to adopt the other alternative. Without the aid of positive physical disease of the brain, a nature so intense and so energetic as hers is incapable of such a fate. It is dull, quiet natures, to whom emotion, when it comes, comes as something strange and abnormal, that are overwhelmed by it—not those to whom it means life and even existence. A man like Warden might possibly go mad, but not a woman like Miss Clare. If ordinary men and women lose their reason under emotional pressure, those like her lose theirs by its absence, not by its presence. If she had in truth been shut up in a convent—if some spiritual director or tyrannous system of discipline had forced her to think it her duty to crush her nature down—she would in all probability, as hundreds in

such a situation have done, have given way, and her spirit, debarred from finding its free and proper course, would doubtless have burst for itself a way to unnatural action through the channel of mania. But, as things were, she whose spirit, strong with the strength of intensesness and energy, had supported her through so many long years of an imperfect and unsatisfied existence, was not likely to break down now under one more pang however sharp, or one more disappointment however bitter. The camel's back, indeed, may be so loaded that a single straw the more may cause it to give way: but there is nothing in which a really strong mind differs more from a strong body than in this, that its strength grows in proportion to the burden that is laid upon it.

Nevertheless it was perhaps an instinctive and unconscious fear of what her fate might be if she continued to remain alone with her pride, her anger, and her grief in the hermitage of Earl's Dene, that caused her to take a step which, trivial and unimportant as it may seem, was, in reality, calculated to operate as a substitute in her case for a plunge into piety on the one hand, and for a lapse into lunacy on the other.

It was not so much that she had become utterly sick to death of Earl's Dene, and of all things about

it and belonging to it, that made the very idea of home hateful to her, and made her long to escape from the influence of its very atmosphere. It was not her way in general to seek to escape from anything, whatever it might be, that came within the scope and range of her daily life. But it was a positive, active, and eager longing to do something, no matter what that something might be—perhaps also, so far as her sex and age would permit, to lose herself in the great world—that led her to take a resolution that astonished all Denethorp more than if it had suddenly been entered by an invading army. She, too, felt an overwhelming desire to experience the trance of Hermotimus, and to transform herself from a cloud in the sky into a drop in the ocean.

At all events her coachman, who for some time past had had nothing to do but smoke pipes in the stable, was considerably astonished when he was told by his mistress that she not only intended to leave Earl's Dene for a time, but that she intended to make a journey to London, which she had not seen since the days when her father sat in Parliament as member for the county, and when she herself had been little more than a precocious school-girl. Of definite purpose in this project of hers she had absolutely none. It was simply and literally that

she wanted to do something, and that there was simply and literally nothing else for her to do.

And this was really doing something, although there may be scarcely any one living who will think it so. The time has long gone by—whether altogether for good, who shall say?—when the longest journey meant anything more than a few hours' trouble, or when there was anybody in England who did not, as a matter of course, make many long journeys every year of his life. But in Miss Clare's case the journey from Denethorp to London meant more than it meant to most people even in those days, and called for as many weeks of preparation as if she had been really a queen about to make a royal progress through her dominions or a visit of ceremony to a foreign state. Of course so great a lady as she, who stood upon her dignity on principle, could not travel but in her own carriage and with her own horses: and, while the former was by no means in the best working order for so important an undertaking, it was doubtful if the latter would be the least capable of comprehending the possibility of the existence of a road beyond the Green Dragon at Redchester—a fact which the coachman must also have by this time forgotten, even if, having been in Miss Clare's service all his days, he had ever had occasion to learn

it. But at last all difficulties were overcome, and the Queen of Denethorp, for the first time since she had returned to it some quarter of a century ago, left her home to appear once more in the very centre of the world.

Her journey necessarily extended over several days: not so much because she, with all her impatience, was not capable of making long stages at a time, as for the sake of the horses, which had grown fat and lazy upon the effects of their mistress's sorrow. And so she gradually proceeded by the easiest of easy marches, until at the end of six days she also had arrived in the great city that seems to draw irresistibly all things and all people to itself at last. The slight exertion of travelling, and the excitement of passing through half-forgotten scenes once more, had been already of some little service to her by having made her brood less upon herself and upon her own thoughts than if she had spent the same number of days at Earl's Dene: but still she arrived at the end of her journey almost worn out. After all, "*Cælum non animum.*"

She was not able to take possession of the town-house that belonged to her, as it was in the occupation of a tenant: nor had she, in her eagerness to leave her country home, taken any steps to provide

herself with a substitute. So, for the present, she took up her quarters at an hotel, and forthwith sent notice of her arrival to the only two people in London with whom she was any longer acquainted—that is to say, to Miss Raymond and Mark Warden—neither of whom lost any time in calling upon her.

How strange the world of London was to Miss Clare may be in part imagined by any one whose experience it has been to return to it after an absence of twenty-five years—a period during which everything, even the general aspect of the streets, becomes changed to such an extent that the few remaining things and people with whom old associations are connected crop up from the level surface of modern society in defiant distinctness, like blocks of primeval granite from the alluvial deposit of centuries. It could not be long before a lady of Miss Clare's wealth and position found herself again in the world after a fashion: but it was in a world that startled the politician of twenty-five years ago. She had, in her seclusion, not neglected to keep herself awake to what was going on by the perusal of books and newspapers: but no one can understand the changes that are constantly being brought about from newspapers and books only, the study of which is as though one should read a gloss without ever having

seen the text upon which it comments. Written words always take their meaning from the mind of the reader. The text consists, after all, not of what actually takes place, but of the manner in which things take place, and what people think and say about them at dinner-tables, in drawing-rooms, in the streets and in the clubs: and not what writers think ought to be thought and said about them in studies and newspaper offices. To understand change one must one's self see and hear—one must one's self breathe the atmosphere in which change is produced: and the knowledge of facts is nothing to one who is beyond the circle of their influence. To one who is devoid of imagination they are as meaningless as algebraical symbols scattered about at random: to one who has that quality they take any combination that he may choose to form out of hundreds, of which not more than one can be, and probably none are, right. The fact is, that Miss Clare had become provincialised, and had come to regard the capital as only a larger Denethorp. She had lost the metropolitan idea—that irreconcilable and victorious opponent of the feudal idea which, in one shape or another, always underlies the *vie de province*. She had become a barbarian, in the proper and original meaning of the word, and was as much

out of her element as a prince from beyond the Indus would have found himself in Rome—not, of course, in the same degree, but in precisely the same way.

As far as concerned her outer life, she just let things come as they would, making no effort whatever to control the manner of their coming. She had, after all, taken to society in the same spirit as that in which a man—if it had been possible for any man to have found himself in a similar mental condition—would probably have taken to brandy. It may possibly be thought that she entertained some vague notion that their being in the same town together, however widely they were separated in every other respect, might perhaps in some impossible and inconceivable manner bring about, in spite of her firm determination to the contrary, some kind of reconciliation with her nephew. Certainly in such matters the hearts of women are capable of any kind and any degree of inconsistency: and such a notion, wild as it would have been, would have been in no wise unnatural or absurd. It does not by any means follow that because, knowing perfectly well as she did that such reconciliation depended entirely upon a single word from herself, she had practically vowed never to speak that word, she might not vaguely dream that by her presence in London she was aiding

chance to defeat her own will. But whether this was so or not, she did not in the least act upon any such idea. She never even mentioned her nephew's name, so that her acquaintance very soon came to see that the subject was a forbidden one. Unfortunately no circumstance could have operated more against Hugh's being able to do anything for himself, or to find friends, than this silence on the part of Miss Clare. Had she talked openly about him and his offence, and given her reasons for the quarrel, it is likely enough that he would have met with sympathy at least, if not with useful help: but the form which her anger had taken was such as to leave the door open to all manner of injurious reports about both himself and his wife, and to cause him to be condemned not only unheard but unaccused. Miss Raymond alone invariably took the part of her old playfellow: but she was as powerless in the matter as she was zealous. Warden also took his part sometimes, but only when in Miss Raymond's company: and then his interference somehow invariably seemed to make the hopelessness of the breach more complete than if he had merely held his tongue and preserved a judicious silence.

It was now for about the first time in his life that the steady brain of the latter began to be just a little

turned. At an age when the healthy mind is content to live in the present; and to confine its foresight to the limits of the day after to-morrow, he had been led by circumstances to obtain a distant and enchanting view of a future full of infinite possibilities, that gave point and coherence to the growth of his ambition.

Now that Miss Clare was in town, he had become, or rather had made himself, absolutely indispensable to her: and, indeed, was it not his duty to render himself useful to his benefactress and patroness in every way that he could? He transacted her business for her—he advised her—he was present whenever she entertained company: he became, in short, her prime minister, over whom, while she respected him, she could yet exercise the authority that it was necessary for her to exercise over some one. But the result was, that the more he came to mix in it, the more he came to regard the great world as his true field, and to scorn professional paths as much as he had formerly honoured them as affording the best prospect of success for his special kind of talent and energy. Politics were already exercising upon his mind that strange and perilous fascination that they so often exercise over minds like his—that fascination which, once felt, scarcely

ever fails to become a life-long passion. Of politics in their higher sense he was, it need not be said, incapable of entertaining the least notion: but of politics as they are understood by most who take part in them—of the politics of intrigue, of faction, of place, and of self-interest—he was capable of entertaining a very clear idea indeed, especially as he was now obliged to realise the fact that he was himself a marketable article. Not only through his association with Miss Clare, but by means of his own many merits of conversation and address, he was forming many useful connections on his own account in the society into which, no one could exactly tell how, he was making a place for himself: and, with the borough of Denethorp full in view, it would be strange indeed if he did not manage before long to make a very good bargain of himself also. There were not a few men of high position and influence who, although he was still an outsider, were known to regard the Fellow of St Margaret's as a certain acquisition to the supporters of Government: and there was no one belonging to the set which he now most cultivated who did not consider that to carry out his original idea of taking to the bar would be to throw his talents away. Moreover, he was already beginning

to be envied and abused—the best omen for his future success of all, seeing that no one envies or abuses a man of whom he is not afraid. None could deny his talents: but, for the rest, men were beginning to call him, behind his back, prig, snob, legacy-hunter, tuft-hunter, place-hunter, and, worst of all, political adventurer—that terrible and mysterious phrase which, heaven knows why! is supposed to express some ineffable and unpardonable sin. It was plain from all this that, if he should, as was expected, make his mark in the House, he might certainly look forward to serving his country in no unprofitable manner, perhaps to his party, certainly to himself. The country doctor's son was already beginning to dream of the Treasury instead of the Woolsack: and, as things seemed, not so very absurdly. In politics, as in other things, adventurers are notoriously fortunate: and why should Mark Warden be less fortunate than others are?

CHAPTER II.

SINCE the opening of this story the tables have thus been completely turned. Then it was Warden and Marie who were found at the bottom of the ladder, though not altogether without reasonable hope of being able, in course of time, to ascend a few steps; while it was Angélique who lived in present comfort, with a vista of success stretching before her, and Hugh to whom the present was so complete—so far as life can be held to be complete without love—that the future was rendered secure. Now, on the contrary, Marie had climbed to the height of fame, and Warden had achieved so much of worldly success that his future was in his own hands, while Angélique had fallen to the earth, and Hugh even below it.

It was certainly, whatever view may be taken of his conduct, at all events hard upon the latter that he should be punished so unmercifully as

he was for no greater offence than that of marrying for love: but then life is very cruel, and he who chooses to act boldly for himself, instead of sighing and yielding to "good advice," courts suffering. It is true that boldness is the best part of wisdom: but, alas! it is seldom the wise who prosper, unless they are something more than wise. Now Angélique, with all her charming qualities—and they were very charming—was one of those women who are infinitely more delightful before than after marriage—as, indeed, such very charming women are somewhat apt to be. But, though this characteristic of hers is by no means uncommon, her husband is not therefore rendered less worthy of compassion, and certainly not the less because his idol was not yet broken. It is by no means fools alone who are constant to their worship in the teeth of the faults and shortcomings of their god or goddess: and it was a wise man who said that "it is a man's faults that render him amiable." In the case of woman, unfortunately, the axiom might be extended still further: for it is far more often her virtues than her faults that bring a man's love for her to an end. Cleopatra will be the successful rival of Octavia in nine cases out of ten. And so Hugh Lester by

no means pitied himself: on the contrary, he flattered himself that though he was certainly unlucky, he was in reality the most fortunate fellow alive — that is to say, that black was white, and that two and two made five. It is a great question if a lunatic whose monomania is of a pleasant nature is a proper object of compassion on the part of the sane, who are wide awake to all the world's disagreeable realities: and it is at least a still greater question if the man who deifies some perfectly human creature is not to be congratulated. At all events, whatever may come to pass, he will have lived and loved—he will once have been happy, even though the god-like attributes of his own invention fall off before his eyes, and leave the clay which they covered and adorned in all the nakedness of its deformity. But though for the present he was fully able to console himself, it would have been some consolation to Miss Clare also had she been able to know how much worse even than she had predicted, the marriage which she had so strongly opposed had actually turned out. It is true that she still loved her nephew in her heart, and that she still wished him all happiness and all prosperity: but it is probable that, daughter of Priam as she was, the

burning of Troy must have gratified Cassandra just a little.

Let it not, however, be for a moment supposed that any theory about the nature of *mésalliances* in general is intended to be founded upon the personal experience of Hugh Lester. On the contrary, had he chosen to fall in love with Marie, when he met her under the great beech—how long ago that morning seemed now!—and had she been free, and had he married her, there is surely every reason to think that the loss of Earl's Dene would have been a benefit to him; and yet the *mésalliance* would have been equally atrocious in the eyes of Miss Clare and of the world. But then Angélique was Angélique, and Marie was Marie. It is just the experience of one man that is now in question, and not that of humanity at large, which, in its romantic—that is to say, its better and truer side—has accepted the fact that a marriage made in the face of the world is, for that very reason, more likely to be made with a right purpose, and more likely to contain the elements of happiness, than where it is open to the suspicion of being made upon lower grounds. No one is likely, save on the lowest grounds of all, and where his own self-interest is concerned, to approve of the doctrine that any one

who has not the misfortune to wear a crown should be made a slave to wealth and station in a matter that concerns himself and his own heart alone—the doctrine, in two words, that *richesse oblige*. Is not, under different names, the story of King Cophetua the theme of half the ballads and half the songs that have ever been written—that is to say, of the expression of the best and most honest impulses of men and women? For every woman is born noble, by right of sex, so long as she does not render herself ignoble, while the noblest-born woman is not more than woman after all. Such, at least, is the orthodox creed of a gentleman: and such, therefore, had been Hugh Lester's, whose misfortunes, accordingly, must not be attributed to the fact that he had married a girl without means or station, but solely to the fact that the girl in question happened to be Angélique Lefort.

And for her, poor girl! while Warden's future seemed to be opening before him just like the surface of some beautiful plain that grows wider and wider every moment as the traveller, step by step, approaches the edge of the table-land that overlooks it, so hers, which had given promise of such wonderful things, was narrowing and narrowing like the face of the same plain under the approach of a night

of hopeless rain. It was not more than a few months since her dreams had been turning her into a countess at the very least. Now, if she dreamed that she was secure of being able to pay the bill for the lodging of herself and her husband at the end of the week, her dream was more pleasant than usual. It was she who held the office of paymaster: for Hugh was an infamously bad economist, and, like mankind in general, as distinguished from womankind, could never be brought, either in theory or practice, to comprehend that triumph of oracular wisdom, which must assuredly have been invented in a moment of inspiration by some queen of *chiffonières*, that a pin a-day makes a groat a-year. These two now had, as much as any two rag-gatherers, to think most painfully of groats and pins: and Angélique, who was a woman, in spite of her large ideas, and a French-woman to boot, took rather a pride in her judicious management of those pence and halfpence which seem so trivial and unimportant to all male creatures who are neither crossing-sweepers nor waiters at *restaurants*. This arrangement was useful in another way besides. Had her husband had the control of their united financial affairs, he would inevitably have made some attempt, however wild, to pay his debts—at all events those that arose from

their own present daily needs—in which case the struggle that she was striving to carry on against hope would have to be given up at once and for ever. But, as it was, Angélique knew enough of the ways of the world to know that a pretty woman who always contrives to dress well enough to do justice to her beauty, even though her husband is not a gentleman of good family, must be very simple indeed, and possess an unusually small amount of tact, if she cannot contrive to keep very fairly afloat without any enormous quantity of present coin: and in her own case to fail to do this would be even exceptionally preposterous, seeing that ready money, even when not absolutely necessary, was always procurable to some extent from the now prosperous Marie, who took to living and dressing in a style far inferior to that of her poor cousin, in order that she might assist the latter without taking from what she considered to be due to the children and to her own husband. Of the very existence of this source of supply, and of the disposal of it, Hugh of course knew nothing: and if he sometimes wondered how they managed to get on at all, it was only to admire the excellent economy of his wife. To see her always well dressed was no wonder to him, for, as he had never seen her otherwise, it appeared to him to be a

part of her very nature: and he would have been as much surprised to see her going about without her head as without the most elegant of head-gear. Indeed it is not an uncommon delusion among men who have not come as yet into personal and immediate collision with the bills of milliners and dress-makers, that pretty women obtain their plumage as inexpensively as birds of paradise obtain theirs.

A man may, and often does, bear poverty and its attendant evils essentially like a hero: but it is unfortunate that it is almost impossible to appear like a hero either in his own eyes or in those of his contemporaries. Hugh Lester was trying to do the best he could: he never complained of what he had brought upon himself, or thought for a moment of complaining: he was honestly willing and eager to turn himself to anything to support himself and his wife as a man should: and it was certainly not his fault, but the fault of circumstance—of his education, of his scrupulousness, of his wife—that he could find nothing to do. And yet he has to appear in the contemptible light of a man who lived in idleness upon the ill-advised credit of tradesmen, and upon the charity of a hard-working girl, who could ill spare what she bestowed. Who shall say after this that this story contains a hero? But perhaps it

is as well that we are ignorant of the details of the *ménage* of Belisarius himself—that great type of reduced gentlemen.

His poverty was the result of his own fault in a double sense. In the first place, he had clearly committed the unpardonable social offence of having deliberately brought it upon himself: and, in the second place, it need not have continued if he had only chosen to act as other men would have done. If he had properly appreciated his wife and shown himself worthy of her confidence instead of her protection, the two together might have carried on the profession or art of living without an income to very great advantage; and than this art or profession, when it is carried on even with a very small amount of skill, there is none better going. It costs a considerable expenditure of time and trouble, it is true, and often ends in a sudden crash: but the expenditure of time and trouble and sudden crashes are incidental to all professions, and it is better than other professions in this, that, although time may be money, the trouble is inexpensive and pleasantly exciting, while the crash costs absolutely nothing at all. "*Cantabit vacuus coram latrone viator*"—which, in this case, may be translated, "A man of straw may laugh at his creditors." But this was Angélique's great diffi-

culty, that she dared not take her husband into her confidence, but had to carry on the game both for herself and for him at once, and to tell lies not only to the world at large, but to him also, whose obvious and manifest duty it was to help her to lie. "Honesty the best policy" indeed!—to quote yet another proverb. This saying must have been invented by some professor of the art of living upon nothing for the express purpose of throwing dust into the eyes and binding the hands of those upon whom, as well as upon nothing, he and his disciples live, in the same way that the rules of etiquette existing in certain less noble professions have apparently been invented for the benefit of those who have the wit and the courage to break them—heavy chains to the weak and to the scrupulous, but to the unscrupulous and to the strong nothing more than bands of tow. No wise man was ever honest for the sake of profit: and when an honest man does succeed, it is most assuredly in spite of his honesty—not in consequence of it.

Nevertheless, thank the gods! disturbed in their eternal calm only by the eternal laughter that this earth of ours must surely afford them, the secret of success is not as yet wholly revealed to men, or the world would be most intolerably divided into the two classes only of the cheaters and the cheated—intoler-

ably in spite of the hackneyed couplet in Hudibras. There are cynics who assert that this is the case, even as things are: but though the story of Diogenes and his lantern is not bad satire, it does not quite follow that satire, to be good, need be based upon mathematical accuracy of observation. It is very likely that had the great Stoic left his lantern in his tub and contented himself with the light of the sunshine, he would not have found his search altogether in vain.

And so, although Hugh Lester may have been driven to get his living in a manner which those whom Diogenes failed to find will certainly condemn, it only proves that a man may cheat without necessarily being a rogue, and be cheated without being of necessity a fool—unless, indeed, it is the mark of a fool to be in love with one's wife, and of a rogue to trust her. In that case, of course, as logicians say, *quæstio cadit*.

So matters went on for a little while. "But," Angélique used to say, whenever by chance Hugh ventured to turn the conversation upon the subject of economy, "what can *you* know about such things? I have been all my life learning how to make nothing go a very long way indeed, and you how to make a great deal go no way at all. We have both suc-

ceeded perfectly. Your knowledge shall be useful to us one of these days, when we are rich : meanwhile mine is most to the purpose, while we are poor. I promise you that I will spend willingly enough when we have plenty to spend—and besides, I should never be able to take care of thousands of pounds. But then you don't know how to manage pence and halfpence as I do." And with this she, who in spite of her professions of diffidence could have managed tens of thousands of pounds to admiration, applied her power to the no less admirable management of real pence and a great many imaginary guineas.

But at last another question arose, and that of a serious kind.

Not even genius can reach the summit of perfection all at once. Enough has been said to show that Mrs Lester was a very good woman of business, and did not find it very difficult to keep her husband in the dark as to means of supply and ways of expenditure. But her capacity for this kind of business was the result of imagination rather than of experience—she had, in short, genius and the making of an artist in her, but she had not as yet graduated as an artist. It was impossible, for instance, for her to have attained to that intimate and practical knowledge of

the law of debtor and creditor which she would doubtless, supposing it to be her fate to continue to tread the paths of pleasantness upon which she had entered, very soon succeed in acquiring. But hers was rather a diplomatic than legal mind: she could gain the favour of tradesmen readily enough, but she did not understand, because she had not yet experienced, the sting that even such worms as tradesmen can put forth when they turn at last. Like most beautiful and charming women, she had far too high an opinion of the influence of beauty and of the charm of manner over men to whom beauty and charm are after all only the attributes of a customer: she thought that butchers and bakers, being, in all essentials, no less men than the idle and complaisant specimens of the sex with whom she had previously come in contact,—no less human than Félix or Hugh—would consider themselves, as Félix or Hugh would have considered themselves, sufficiently repaid for the loss of any number of legs of mutton by a smile. But—alas in the interests of art that it should be so!—butchers have creditors, and bakers have families whose pockets and appetites have to be satisfied with something more than the looks, however sweet, of a customer, however pretty. For, to speak *en passant*, to this pass had she come that

the path upon which she had entered was widening, little by little, into the broadest and easiest path of all. One cannot hold that there is much difference in spirit between her who pays for mutton-chops with smiles and her who pays for an establishment with more than mere smiles. But this is just overstepping the threshold of a sermon, and of a rather commonplace sermon besides, which would be out of place here. It is much more to the purpose to say at once that, in a far less time than may very likely have been suggested by what has been said, Hugh Lester, of all men in the world—who still, like most men of his stamp who find themselves in his position, fancied that the miracle of the ravens of Cherith was no miracle at all, and had almost been driven, by ocular demonstration and by the faith of his heart, to believe that his wife was literally one of the lilies of the field,—found himself one day suddenly touched upon the shoulder not very many yards from his own door. Unlike the experienced debtor who could not even run up against a post without instinctively asking “At whose suit?” he, absurdly and weakly enough, no doubt, was astonished to find that he was indebted to Madame Jupon, of Bond Street—who, in those days, had not heard of Madame Jupon?—to the extent of a hundred and twenty odd pounds. So

far as he was concerned it might just as well have been to the extent of a hundred and twenty odd thousand, for he was just as capable of paying the part as the whole: and, in the teeth of Euclid, the part is often fully equal to the whole, if not, according to the doctrine of Hesiod and of Dick Barton, greater still.

Unfortunately this, great as it was to him, was only one of many debts: nor was it long before the unlucky carrion became the sport of a legion of kites who flocked to avenge themselves upon the bare bones of the fallen carcass for its having proved too lean to provide them with a substantial meal. It was to be noticed, however, that Mrs Lester was not so very much put out as might reasonably have been expected when she received a note from her husband dated from Cursitor Street. On the contrary, she rose to the occasion grandly. She dashed off an answer full of hope and confidence: and then, instead of acting like a weak woman by hastening to console him who loved her so much by her personal sympathy, acted like a good wife by setting off at once to her old friend Madame Jupon.

Now, in spite of what has been said on the matter, it will probably still be thought that this climax in Hugh's difficulties was, after all, rather premature.

Angélique might, indeed, one may fairly think, have contrived to postpone his making the acquaintance of her milliner's long-standing account—for it related principally to the time when she had her conquests still to make—in so disagreeable a manner for just a little longer. But the fact is, that it is difficult to do complete justice to her talents, which, with regard to this matter, she did not only show by leaving Madame much comforted in mind as to the result of a debt which for some time past she had been thinking of setting down as hopelessly bad.

It may be laid down as an axiom in social as well as in political diplomacy that, when something happens which might easily have been avoided with the exercise of a very small amount of skill on the part of the person who is principally affected by it—when the person in question has in general some diplomatic genius, and when the result is clearly for the benefit of the same person—he or she is at all events, to some extent, a not inactive agent in bringing it about.

Now, in the present case, Angélique had tried all the schemes that were open to her, and thought over all that were not, or that could by any possibility suggest themselves to her as means of reopening the communication between her husband and his

aunt, and she had come to the inevitable conclusion that all obvious and ordinary means were as vain as they were in reality. Nothing short of at least one miracle would suffice to move Hugh in the matter—nothing short of at least ten would move Miss Clare: and, with all her talents, the power to work such miracles in either case was not hers. But even without so great a power a great deal can be done. If one only has the courage not to be afraid of difficulties, it is not so very hard, simply by watching occasions and opportunities, to convert into instruments of one's purpose the difficulties themselves. So it could not but occur to her, as indeed it would have occurred to almost every one, that to make a show of yielding to Fate was, in truth, the best aggressive policy. Hundreds of chess-matches have been won by the deliberate sacrifice even of a rook, and that not necessarily towards the close of a game. Now this slight accident that had befallen her husband could scarcely be considered as being of so much consequence as the loss of even a pawn. On the contrary, she could manage to get on without him altogether exceedingly well for the present, and to take very good care of her own beautiful self, without feeling the necessity of a knight to help her. But it was in far more than this that she hoped to

derive advantage from the apparent catastrophe. It was highly important that Hugh's difficulties should reach a point, at which even the most obdurate of all aunts might think herself enabled to give way without losing her dignity. Miss Clare, if she was not to be moved by affection, was just one to be moved by the fear of notorious disgrace: and as a disgrace she would be sure to consider the imprisonment for debt and the complete insolvency of Hugh. If, as seemed likely, a regular reconciliation was and must continue to be impossible, it was still by no means unlikely that Miss Clare, for her own sake, would feel herself bound to extricate the young couple from their present embarrassment, and to provide means for enabling them to start afresh under more favourable auspices than had hitherto shone upon them: a matter that would certainly be very possible for the mistress of Earl's Dene, and would not derogate a jot from the pride which she felt in holding to a resolve that was once formed. Indeed it would be nothing more than what the world would expect from her. Thinking thus, it was no more than natural that Angélique should succeed in impressing her husband's creditors with what, from her own point of view, she conceived to be the character of Miss Clare, and with the improbability of their ever being

paid anything unless they brought things to a climax at once. In short, Madame Jupon's might be the hand that smote: but the real arresting creditor was Angélique herself.

Nevertheless, grateful as Hugh ought by rights to have been to his wife for the zeal that she had shown on his behalf, he was, in point of fact, only surprised at, and certainly not gratified by, the result of her zeal. Whatever he might become afterwards, and although, in spite of his troubles, he still kept a plentiful stock of good spirits wherefrom to draw strength against the ills of life, he had not as yet come to such a pass as to look upon this new experience of his as one of the incidents of life to which a man is daily and hourly liable—in fact, as one of those diseases of poor human nature which are so common and so absurd in their symptoms as to be rather a good joke than anything else, like sea-sickness, toothache, or the bilious headache that visits a man who has enjoyed himself too much the night before.

The immediate result was that he found himself compelled to breathe the atmosphere, black and fetid as if with a decayed blight of debt, that surrounds Lincoln's Inn: that he had to meditate upon himself and his position no longer, as had been his custom,

at freedom upon the flagstones, but in a chair: and that he was deprived of the power of putting any conclusion at which his meditations might happen to arrive into practice, even if any had come of them—a result which, judging from the past, did not seem likely.

As may well be conceived, he was without any superfluity of coin about him when he found himself in this plight: and his host instinctively saw at once that he was not one who would do much credit to the house, or even be a fairly profitable customer. He knew that Hugh was Miss Clare's nephew and had been her reputed heir, for it was his business, and the business of those with whom he had many dealings, to know such things: but he judged by outward signs. It was a bad omen when one who looked so much like a gentleman, and was young enough to be careless and free-handed, did not accompany his inevitable demand for writing materials with an order for a bottle of champagne to oil his pen. So, as the house was full, he did not entertain so much respect for his guest as to respect his privacy: and accordingly, in the course of an hour or two, had the pleasure of introducing him to a still later comer, who, for a wonder, broke the universal rule which makes men invariably, when they find

themselves in such circumstances, ask for pen, ink, and paper, whether they want them or no, but who did ask for brandy-and-water—which, though not champagne, was yet more profitable to the house than ink. There was no mistaking the voice in which the order was given: and Hugh was at once aware that he was doomed for the present to enjoy the society of Mark Warden's friend and enemy, Dick Barton himself.

The latter had entered in his usual rough fashion, and without saying a word beyond what was just necessary to ask for what he wanted, with the addition of an expletive or two of the kind which he most affected. Then he threw himself into a chair and stared hard at Hugh. Poverty certainly has the merit of bringing people together who else would never meet. At Cambridge both had been too well known, each in his own way, not to have known each other by sight: but even there they had never actually met, for there had been absolutely nothing in common between them—not even acquaintances, as any one will understand who is old enough to remember the time when undergraduate society was not, as it is now, of the nature of a social and democratic republic tempered by plutocracy, but that of an aristocracy pure and simple. Since then they

had met that once in Warden's chambers, when it had not seemed likely that they would ever meet again. Now, however, there had come to exist between them the strongest of all social bonds—the fact that neither of them was the possessor of as much as ten shillings in the world.

Dick Barton stared long and hard at Hugh while taking his brandy-and-water by large gulps. Then he said, without preface,—

“Well, that's what I call quick work! On which sort of beasts have you ridden such post-haste here—horses, rooks, or women? Or have you been performing a rapid act of horsemanship on all three? And are you quite cleaned out—or can you lend me such a thing as half-a-crown?”

CHAPTER III.

It is written, saith André the Chaplain, in the nineteenth article of that Code of Love which, delivered to a knight of Bretagne by the falcon that was perched by Arthur's throne, had been observed by all men unto this day, "*Si amor minuatur, cito deficit et raro convalescit*:" which, being interpreted, is to say, "If love grow less, it quickly falls away and seldom recovers."

Now it was with the strongest and strangest feeling of mental disquiet that she had ever known that Marie attempted, as usual, to set about her daily routine of work when her husband once more left her alone at the end of their last conversation. It has been said that she had not in the least comprehended the meaning of what he had said to her any more than if he had spoken to her in the language of the said André himself instead of his own, and this is literally true: but there is a way of instinc-

tively feeling the drift of a person's meaning which falls very far short of comprehension, but is, for that very deficiency, all the more suggestive. Once more, the half may be far, very far, greater than the whole.

Of course almost any one but herself would have come to know for certain, long ago, that she had ceased to be to her husband what he had intended honestly to make her when he so prematurely persuaded her to become his wife—honestly, that is, so far as honesty may lie in fancy and passion unsupported by any of the better things that go to make love what love should be. Any one but herself would have seen, to put the matter shortly, that he was tired of her and of her love—a *dénouement* which any wise man would have seen from the beginning. But the special circumstances of her position prevented her from seeing this, however strong—strong in proportion to their vagueness and dimness—might be the warnings of her heart. She had never at any time known the fulness of the love which on both sides alike gives all and takes all without stint and without fear: and such semblance of its fulness as she had known had fallen upon her when she was a child in spirit as well as in years. Since then love had never, even for a season, been to her the daily food from which she drew her life and

strength : on the contrary, her marriage, such as it was, had been to her only a kind of abstract idea, derived, not from her own experience, but from the slight and partial knowledge of marriage which she was able to obtain from her observation of the experience of others, to the use of which she did not possess the key. Of late, indeed, she had turned to other food altogether, and had come to support the life of her soul by her art and her friendship, without in any absorbing degree feeling any overpowering longing for the love of her youth, except so far as it represented and typified to her the dreams of love, unconnected with any special person, for the fulfilment of which her woman's heart could not avoid longing. In this respect her dreams were those of a girl : and her very purity caused them to be such as a wife ought not to entertain, even unconsciously. But it must be admitted that she was not without excuse, and that the chain by which she was bound could not in any case have proved strong enough to confine the dreams of a girl to their legally proper object. Even love, unsubstantial as it is, must have something whereon to feed : and though it may be proof against absence, and even thrive upon cruelty, it must inevitably fade away before positive indifference.

But still, though indeed love may be starved to death more or less quickly, it cannot be killed utterly all at once—it knows not of the accident of sudden death: and when its place has been taken by acknowledged duty, its ghost—in all appearance more substantial than the unburied corpse—will still perseveringly haunt the heart from which the rightful tenant has long since departed. Marie could have no more told herself, in plain thought, that she neither loved nor was loved in any true sense any longer, than she could have told a deliberate lie, even though this would have been but the naked truth. Love itself had really died, but its soul had passed into the form of duty, on whose miserable reed she was now leaning with all her strength, as if it had been a crowbar.

Duty is at best but a weak support to a weak heart, and it is never so treacherous as when it assumes the guise of some one of its enemies: and this was her case, now that she had come to call her sense of duty love for her husband, while she called by the name of friendship what not only the keen eyes of Monsieur Prosper but the blind eyes of the indifferent world had already seen to be friendship of a very dangerous order indeed. Is it then true, after all, that the best kind of friendship—that between a man and a woman—is only a beautiful idea; that it is only love under a false and treach-

erous name? Is it possible that the men of "common-sense" may be right for once, after all? Well, let them be right for once! It does not happen very often. Only this may be said, that whether they are right or wrong, facts are facts, and no theories will include all cases. If Marie's friendship for Félix was fated to turn into something more, it does not follow that she thereby illustrated any theory whatever, or overthrew any.

"*Nemo duplici potest amore ligari*," says the third article of the Code aforesaid—that is to say, no one can love two people at the same time. If friendship was to grow into love, then, according to the quoted authority, her old love must grow into friendship at the very most. But still, dying love, while it is undergoing the actual process of transformation into friendship or duty, as the case may be, is apt to die hard—to make a far more active resistance to any new-born inclination than living love—simply because it cannot help having an unconscious consciousness, if one may use so transcendental an expression, of its coming fate. And so Marie's heart fought hard—so hard that it began to ache with the struggle. Indeed she was just one of those women of gentle soul who never know when they are beaten, and will die rather than yield. Had she been free,

her love would now have been hard to gain, and, of all men, Mark Warden would have had the least chance of gaining it: but, as she had once bestowed it, it was harder still for him to whom she had given it to force her to resume her free gift.

Fame and artistic success are all very well, but where is the woman to whom they can be all? It is possible for a man to become an artist and nothing more: and then, if he does so, he remains but half a man. He has mutilated his soul, whatever he and the world may gain by the process. He is like one who has made himself a king: he has forfeited the right and the power to be happy as nature bids him and all men and all creatures. He has done even worse for himself than the man who bestows the whole of his soul's youth in crushing the flowers that grow about and around it with his pickaxe, in order that he may grope for the mere earthly gold that lies below them. The latter crushes with the flowers the desire to enjoy their beauty and fragrance: but the former, the more he gathers merely in order that he may paint or sing them, only adds a pang the more to that struggling nature of his that he subdues. When the pith is drawn from his heart, and the poor, dry, empty thing is notched in holes in order that the

sun may forget to die, that the lilies may revive, and that the dragon-fly may come back to dream, yet still—does not the story end?—

“The true gods sigh for the cost and the pain,
For the reed that grows never more again
As a reed with the reeds of the river.”

But if this be the case with a man, how can a woman bear the conversion into a musical instrument at the hands of the beast-god and live at all? None ever did—none ever can. With her, nature—not artistic or intellectual, but sheer womanly nature—will have its course: and if not in one way, then in another. Marie's was not only deprived of its legitimate outlet, but was debarred by the heavenly force of honesty and purity from consciously seeking out for itself any that were not legitimate. Nothing seemed left to her but her art: and, true artist although she was, art with her could be no substitute for nature any more than it can be with any other woman.

Had there been any to observe her with anxious eyes—and, Félix excepted, there was none so to observe her—they would have seen her face growing pale, the orbits of her eyes growing larger and darker, her lips growing graver. But, at the same time, those who regarded her indifferently saw no

changes in her but for the better. If the cheeks were growing more pale, they were, in compensation, losing their *bourgeois* contour in order to gain a more refined and purer outline: if the grey eyes were retreating under the brows, they were at the same time growing in brightness and in depth of colour and of expression: if the curve of her lips was graver, it was also at once both more sweet and more firm than in the Denethorp days. She was in fact developing from the chrysalis state of the country girl, the worshipper of Mark Warden, the friend of Miss Laura, into the Psyche—the woman, with all a true woman's capacities for joy and sorrow, not of the mind but of the heart. Artist as she was almost by accident, it was not till now that the true crisis of her deeper nature had come. She, too, was being plucked from among her fellow-reeds: she, too, was having her heart drawn from her: and, though she knew it not, she, too, was feeling the sharpness of the steel as it entered through her side.

But, however it might be with her, it was becoming far different with her friend—since one must needs call him so: for, seeing that she was the wife of another man, and he the professed lover of another woman, what more should they be than

friends? But still, contemptuously, or rather angrily, as he had treated Barton's not unreasonable accusation against her, he was wrong if he thought that the anger of which he was fully conscious was produced by thorough-going trust in her purity—a virtue in which no man who has lived as he had lived and experienced what he had experienced is capable of believing implicitly and unquestioningly. It is strange that a woman, even the most versed in the ways of the world, will trust one whom she knows to be a *roué*, while the least impure among men can scarcely ever bring himself wholly to trust even an angel. And so, if Marie was growing unhappy, Félix was growing positively miserable, whatever his outward life might be: and the misery which he was now beginning to experience was one with which disappointment and even jealousy itself are scarcely to be compared in point of depth and sharpness. There is a time in the life of every dreamer—that is to say, of every man who does not live by sense alone—when all his beliefs and ideas appear to him to have been mere empty illusions, and to have vanished one by one: when his mind and his heart alike seem to have grown prematurely old: when, in a word, the man not only fancies himself, but is in reality, *blasé*. The illusions, if such they be,

come back again, it is true: for though it is the lot of a dreamer to grow old many times in the course of his life, he has the compensating faculty, denied to those who pass their time in waking energy, of being able to renew his youth after every fit of old age. Even as it is his to know what is meant by old age even in his youth, so it is his also to know what is meant by youth even at the extreme limit of his days. But the first time that he has to pass through the furnace of lost illusions is very hard to bear, and he clings to the last that is left as a drowning man clings to the last spar that floats within his reach. He does not know that he has only to put down his feet and hold up his head in order to touch the firm ground: he believes himself to be vainly struggling to keep himself afloat on the face of the unfathomable sea, and that if the piece of timber to which he clings in his despair should slide from his grasp, he must inevitably sink down to keep company with the remnants of so many wrecked lives. To Félix, this one last solitary spar was Marie: and this, too, seemed to be slipping away from his grasp like other things. If she was what Barton had called her—and why should she not be?—then there was indeed no good thing left. He was not, of course, by any means strait-laced, and would willingly have

made any woman his friend, whoever and whatever she might be, had sympathy, the one thing needful in friendship, existed between him and her: it was that like every man he clung, and all the more the less he believed in it, to the idea of purity in woman, and liked to think that it existed somewhere in the actual world, though but in one instance alone, and that that instance was known to him. His life had not been such as to permit of his seeing much of it, either in appearance or in reality: and he had in consequence been raising Marie to be the tutelary goddess of his own special altar to Venus Urania. Hugh Lester had been loyally content to worship his image of clay: but Félix had come to lose faith in his image of gold. And so, if the former was worthy of compassion, the latter was worthy of it a hundred-fold. It was now that he was worthy of it—not when his *grande passion* had come to its final chapter. For, however much Hugh may have gained from Angélique to compensate him for what she had caused him to lose, to Félix—even supposing that he had had anything to lose besides illusions—she would most certainly have proved to be all loss and no gain.

It was wonderful how this new disturbance of mind drove out the old. But it was something like

tively feeling the drift of a person's meaning which falls very far short of comprehension, but is, for that very deficiency, all the more suggestive. Once more, the half may be far, very far, greater than the whole.

Of course almost any one but herself would have come to know for certain, long ago, that she had ceased to be to her husband what he had intended honestly to make her when he so prematurely persuaded her to become his wife—honestly, that is, so far as honesty may lie in fancy and passion unsupported by any of the better things that go to make love what love should be. Any one but herself would have seen, to put the matter shortly, that he was tired of her and of her love—a *dénouement* which any wise man would have seen from the beginning. But the special circumstances of her position prevented her from seeing this, however strong—strong in proportion to their vagueness and dimness—might be the warnings of her heart. She had never at any time known the fulness of the love which on both sides alike gives all and takes all without stint and without fear: and such semblance of its fulness as she had known had fallen upon her when she was a child in spirit as well as in years. Since then love had never, even for a season, been to her the daily food from which she drew her life and

strength : on the contrary, her marriage, such as it was, had been to her only a kind of abstract idea, derived, not from her own experience, but from the slight and partial knowledge of marriage which she was able to obtain from her observation of the experience of others, to the use of which she did not possess the key. Of late, indeed, she had turned to other food altogether, and had come to support the life of her soul by her art and her friendship, without in any absorbing degree feeling any overpowering longing for the love of her youth, except so far as it represented and typified to her the dreams of love, unconnected with any special person, for the fulfilment of which her woman's heart could {not avoid longing. In this respect her dreams were those of a girl : and her very purity caused them to be such as a wife ought not to entertain, even unconsciously. But it must be admitted that she was not without excuse, and that the chain by which she was bound could not in any case have proved strong enough to confine the dreams of a girl to their legally proper object. Even love, unsubstantial as it is, must have something whereon to feed : and though it may be proof against absence, and even thrive upon cruelty, it must inevitably fade away before positive indifference.

attributes are lost, or discovered to have been without existence altogether.

In short, in spite of his professed loyalty to his *grande passion*, which had now grown so hollow, he was drifting into that horrible condition in which a man finds himself when he is at one and the same time forced to love and forced to despise: to love, that is, not after the manner of the body merely, which is perfectly consistent with any amount of contempt, but in the true way—the way in which contempt enters, when it does enter, like a serpent into a garden of pure flowers.

There is very little use indeed in attempting to describe what people say and do under the pressure of extreme moral pain when the pain must of necessity strike inwards. It is easy enough to give an account of the heroic condition of outward rebellion into which a man falls when he loses some Rosaline or other, or when she proves cruel: but these are “anythings born of nothing.” When his *grande passion* had come to its untimely end, Félix had avoided his friends, thrown his dreams of love and art to the winds, and fallen into a brain-fever: but to describe his life now would be simply to say that he ate, and drank, and slept—after a fashion—and went about such business as he had to go about, like other men. There is no passion, after all, so

deep, no affection so strong, that it will not yield to the omnipotent tyranny of pride, or at all events carry itself as though it had yielded. Miss Clare's affection for Hugh had undergone this process: and it will certainly have been seen by this time that Félix, if in the matter of pride he was inferior to her, was certainly not more deficient in that quality than other men. At all events he was too proud to confess himself the lover of one whom his jealousy, in spite of himself, forced him to fear was unworthy of the only kind of love that is worth bestowing, and far too proud to willingly render himself liable to the charge of inconstancy—a sin for which he entertained to the full the old-fashioned romantic contempt that is supposed by men like him to have existed once upon a time in practice as well as in poetic theory. He still tried his best, as a matter of conscience, to cling to the empty shadow of his old passion, and to believe in its reality, even though he must in his soul have known well that the old curse was upon him,—

“That they who change old love for new—
Pray God they change for worse:”

and that, if what Barton had said was in any degree true, it looked as though the curse was in a due way of being fulfilled.

Thus he had now to struggle, and as it seemed

vainly, to carry on the losing battle of a dying love : and not only so, but to carry it on against the overwhelming force of a foe that he both feared and hated, but to which he began to feel that he was wellnigh inevitably doomed to yield at last, even if he had not yielded to it already. The night indeed was departing, and day was at hand : but the day that had begun gradually to rise was attended and covered by dark clouds of ill omen that made it look even more threatening and full of gloom than those of the midnight that had in its own time seemed so terrible to bear.

END OF THE SECOND VOLUME.

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47





